



A Parent's Guide to: **Building Blocks: A Guide to Reading Readiness**

Parents and schools
working together for
student achievement.

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It may surprise you to know that the best time to begin teaching a child to read is at birth! Reading does not begin with learning the letters of the alphabet, but instead begins at the very early age when babies first hear their mothers talking to them. We often hear the phrase "It's never too late to..." but in the case of language and literacy development, "It's never too early...!"

Researchers have also found that not giving children a variety of opportunities with verbal and written language until they are in school can severely limit a child's progress in reading and writing. Literacy is the ability to communicate, read, and write. As parents, day care providers, and early childhood educators, we can give children the benefit of early literacy education with little effort or money...

Educators have learned a great deal about how children learn to read and write.

To become skilled and confident readers, children need many opportunities to:

1. Build spoken language by talking and listening
2. Learn about the sounds of spoken language
3. Learn about print and books
4. Learn about the letters of the alphabet
5. Listen to books read aloud

The following guide explores the four areas that are considered to be the 'building blocks' that children need in order to become skilled and confident readers. Each of the skill areas is explained along with examples of activities you can do at home to help build your child's skills.

SPOKEN LANGUAGE – Talking and Listening

The importance of spoken language is often underestimated when thinking about reading success. Simply talking to your baby, toddler or preschooler plays a large part in acquiring language and literacy, or the ability to read and write.

Children who hear a lot of rich, meaningful language have better vocabulary and word skills which help them do better in school.

In their first 5 years most children:

- Frequently use new words when speaking.
- Take part in conversations with familiar adults and children.
- Ask and answer questions.
- Listen attentively when books are read aloud.
- Understand and follow simple directions.

- Identify sounds in the environment.

Home strategies to support language skills:

- When you do something together—eating, shopping, going to the park, or visiting a friend—talk about it while you are doing it and after you are finished
- Use color and size words, comparison (bigger, faster) and position words (behind, next to, over, under etc.) Talk about objects being the ‘same or ‘different
- Help your child learn to follow directions by using short, clear sentences to tell him what you want him to do, for example, “Please take off your shoes.” “Put your shoes in the closet.” Increase the number of directions as your child gets older, but still keep it short and clear.
- Expand on your child’s language – when he says, “look at the big fish,” you can respond with “That’s a whale. It is a great big animal, as big as a truck. It lives in the ocean.”
- Use open-ended questions to encourage more than a simple yes or no reply, for example, “What book did you read at day care today? Instead of asking, “Did you read a book today?”
- Encourage your child to tell stories using books, pictures and even puppets, dolls or action figures. Be sure to allow plenty of time to listen carefully to the story as well as to make appropriate comments or ask questions.
- Listen to children’s music or books on tape to practice following directions and increase listening skills.
- Label items throughout the day and in conversations. Identify new words and explain their meaning.
- Use adjective and adverbs (words that describe people, places, things, or actions such as the pretty doll or the noisy car or the girl sang loudly) when talking with your child and explain how they increase the meaning of what they see, hear, taste, touch, or smell.

PHONOLOGICAL OR SOUND AWARENESS – Sounds in Spoken language

Phonological Awareness (or sound awareness) is the ability to recognize words that rhyme (Matt the fat cat); words that begin with the same sound (bird, ball, baby, bounce); and words that have syllables or individual parts (ta-ble / com-pu-ter). Research has confirmed that children who show awareness of the sounds used in words are better equipped to learn to read.

In their first 5 years most children:

- Recognize the sounds of rhyming words and play rhyming games.
- Recognize the beginning sounds of words.
- Hear syllables within words.

Home strategies to support phonological or sound awareness:

- Read books with rhyming words. In a familiar book, point to the rhyming word as you read, pause and let the child fill-in-the-blank.
- Rhyme nonsense words – sat, fat, gat, hat, wat...
- Play with the sounds of words...bubble gum, bubblebum, Humpty Dumpty, Bumpty Lumpty.
- Play games with rhymes like “I say run, you say ____ (fun), I say fun, you say ____ (sun), I say sun... and so on.
- Have fun with tongue twisters like “Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.”
- Group words by the sounds they begin with (ball, baby, bounce, big, boy). Add a word with a different sound and see if they can pick it out.
- Draw attention to syllables in a word by clapping or marching as you say each syllable (ta – ble (2 syllables), mag-a-zine (3), Jess-i-ca-Ma-rie (5), and so on.

PRINT AWARENESS AND WRITING

Print awareness is the understanding that written words are related to spoken words and that speech can be written down. Print awareness is an important part of knowing how to read and write.

In the first 5 years, most children:

- Recognize print.
- Learn that print and words are read left to right, and top to bottom.
- Learn that writing has many different purposes.
- Learn that spoken words are represented by writing.
- Demonstrate the ability to communicate a message either by drawing or writing.
- Experiment with writing tools.
- Attempt to write their own first name and/or letters of the alphabet.

Home strategies for print awareness and writing:

- Have your child hold the book, find the first page and occasionally turn a page as you read. Point out the authors name and title of the book.
- Point out the beginning and end of the story.
- Provide paper with markers, pencils and crayons; encourage your child to write and draw.
- Point out words and letters wherever you can—magazines, menus, maps, instruction manuals and so on. Read street and traffic signs, billboards, store and restaurant signs.
- Run your fingers under a line of print as you read so the listener can follow along the lines of print. Point out individual words and letters.
- Label items in your home (refrigerator, stove, toy box) with the word printed on a card so the child can relate the printed word with the object.
- Make grocery or “to-do” lists with your child and check off items as they are purchased or completed. This is an example of how print gives us useful information.
- Encourage your child to tell you a story. Write it down and read it back to them.
- Print your child’s name, saying each letter as you write it. Encourage him/ her to do the same. Make a name sign for her bedroom door.
- Write a note to a friend or relative

ALPHABET KNOWLEDGE

Singing the alphabet song is not only a fun activity, it is also a learning activity. Children who go to kindergarten already knowing the shapes and names of the letters of the alphabet have an easier time learning to read.

In the first 5 years, your child will:

- Know that each letter in the alphabet has a name.
- Name at least 10 letters of the alphabet, often those in their own first name

Home strategies to support alphabet learning:

- Point out letters of the alphabet. Outdoors find signs, billboards, store ads, box labels, and price tags. Indoors, take advantage of kitchen items, magazines, newspapers, mail, books, and cereal boxes. . .
 - Put magnetic letters on the fridge and name them with your child.
 - Sing the alphabet song
 - Read alphabet books – the library will have a large assortment of them.
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LISTEN TO BOOKS READ ALOUD

Reading aloud to children has been called the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for reading success. Reading a book with your child actively participating helps them learn new words, learn more about the world, learn about written language, and see the connection between words that are spoken and words that are written. **Reading to your child 15 minutes at day increases their vocabulary by 1000 words a year!**

By age 5 most children:

- Show interest in books and reading
- Listen attentively to books read aloud
- Follow the series of events in some stories
- Connect what happens in books to real-life experiences
- Ask questions and make comments that show they understand the book

Strategies to support reading skills:

- Read every day to your children for at least 15 minutes.
- Be a role model for reading. Let your children see you reading.
- Tell stories. Use experiences from your past or when your child was a baby.
- Encourage your child to participate in reading the book. Ask questions about the characters in the book; ask what could happen next.
- Choose books that relate to your child's life. Read books about upcoming events in your family like going to grandmas or a doctor appointment; starting school or walking to the park.
- Read "predictable" books with repeated words, phrases, questions or rhymes. Your child will soon recognize the repeated words and will enjoy saying them with you. *Brown Bear, Brown Bear What Do You See* by Bill Martin, Jr. is an example of a predictable book.
- Read favorite books over and over
- Read a variety of books:
 - Story books
 - Information books or books about things your child likes in real-life– cars, dogs, camping, special people etc.
 - Books with rhyming words
 - Number or counting books
 - Alphabet and poetry books

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