



OVERVIEW – LITERACY FROM K – 2

Young children learn important ‘emergent literacy’ skills before they start school. Parents and carers can give their children a great start to becoming literate in the early years. For examples see our *Early Childhood Development* fact sheet⁴.

The focus of this fact sheet is on literacy learning in the early years of school: from Kindergarten (Foundation) to Year 2.

There is much high-quality evidence about what has the greatest impact to support literacy learning in the early years of school. In this fact sheet, we summarise guidance from the UK-based *Education Endowment Foundation*² and the Australian *Evidence for Learning (E4L) Group*³. This guidance aligns well with the Australian Curriculum¹. We also provide some practical ways that parents and carers can help young children to develop their literacy skills.

Key messages:



Literacy has different elements. They are separated in the guidance^{2,3} and in the text below, but they are linked in practice.



Two important aspects of literacy learning in the early years need to be woven together:

1. learning to ‘decode’ written language (i.e. convert written words to spoken words), and
2. learning this in ways that are meaningful to each child.

SPEAKING AND LISTENING

- Oral language skills are the foundation for literacy learning.
- Encouraging children’s speaking and listening skills from an early age helps them build their vocabulary, and supports reading, comprehension and writing.

How you can help:



Sing songs and play with rhymes together.

Audio-record or write down a story your child tells you, then play or read it back to them.

Help them follow instructions for making something (for example, a recipe).

Encourage conversations by asking children to talk about their experiences and interests.

Use eye contact and body language to let children know you are listening to what they say.

READING

- Learning to read involves understanding that words are made up of letters, and that letters represent sounds. This is called 'phonics' and is central to learning to read.
- Teachers in the early years of schooling ensure that phonics is taught explicitly to children.
- To make sure that children enjoy reading, they should have opportunities to read different kinds of texts about many different topics.

How you can help:



Point out letters and words on signs when you're walking together in town, in a park, in a museum or in a shop.

Read lots of different kinds of texts: not only books but also recipes, magazines, leaflets.

Take turns reading: Read aloud to your child, read aloud together, and listen to them read to you.

While reading:

- tune in to their reactions and be interested
- take turns using imagination to predict what may happen next
- ask them questions about what's happening in the story
- make links between books and what your child already knows
- give encouragement and praise.

WRITING

- Even young children benefit from opportunities to practise making 'marks': for example using a coloured pencil to draw on paper.
- Learning to write involves:
 - physical skills: handwriting and typing on a keyboarding, and
 - intellectual skills: spelling, forming sentences, and punctuation.
- Children need lots of practice with writing, including forming letters correctly. They won't always get it right. It helps to give constructive feedback. Good feedback:
 - is specific and clear: on what the child does well and on how to do something different to fix an error
 - compares what a child can do well now that they could not do before
 - is encouraging and supports children to keep trying.
- Spelling needs to be taught explicitly. It works best when it is related to topics children are learning about, both in school and at home.

How you can help:



Make 'marks' together: drawing, writing their (and your) name, creating a mini-story or a letter to send to a relative or friend.

Use different tools: pencils, finger paint, sticks in the sand, and computers/tablets/phones.

Talk about what words look like, the patterns they make, and what they sound like.

Keep your child motivated by giving good feedback (see above).

Play games that involve drawing, writing and/or using words, such as boardgames and word-finders.

Use texts in pretend play, for example creating a menu or a treasure map.

Read together as much as possible, because reading helps to improve writing skills.

ASSESSMENT AND SUPPORT FOR STRUGGLING STUDENTS

→ As parents or carers you spend a lot of time with your children and know them well. If you are concerned that your child seems to be struggling with their literacy, it is important to talk with their teachers.

Teachers can:



Use their own professional knowledge as well as formal tests to check if your child is meeting their literacy milestones.

Discover if there is a specific aspect of literacy your child finds hard.

Adapt their teaching to match what your child needs help with.

Arrange for additional support if needed.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO AT HOME?



Be positive about school learning.

If you have time, become involved in school-community engagement initiatives.

Visit your local library and ask for books on topics your child is interested in.

Model literacy in many different ways (read a book, write a postcard, listen to a podcast, watch a documentary, look up a website, make a shopping list, read a map) and explain what you're reading / writing / hearing / seeing with your child.

Encourage your child to play, use their imagination, be creative and collaborate.

Make literacy activities fun and enjoyable, not a chore or a test.

Praise your child's efforts.

REFERENCES AND USEFUL LINKS

Sources

- ¹ ACARA (n.d.). Literacy. <https://australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/literacy/>
- ² Education Endowment Foundation (2017). *Improving literacy in Key Stage 1*. London: Education Endowment Foundation. <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/tools/guidance-reports/literacy-ks-1/>
- ³ Evidence for Learning (2020). *Improving literacy in lower primary*. Sydney: Evidence for Learning. <https://evidenceforlearning.org.au/guidance-reports/improving-literacy-in-lower-primary-school/>
- ⁴ Peter Underwood Centre (2019). Early Childhood development (fact sheet). https://www.utas.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/1263572/Underwood-Centre-Fact-Sheet-One.pdf

Useful links

Evidence for Learning (Australia):

<https://www.evidenceforlearning.org.au/evidence-informed-educators/early-childhood-education/resources-for-working-with-parents/>
<https://evidenceforlearning.org.au/assets/Webinars/2020/Webinar-Improving-Literacy-in-Primary-School-.pdf>
<https://evidenceforlearning.org.au/assets/Webinars/2020/Webinar-Home-Supported-Learning.pdf>

Other Australian sources:

<https://australiancurriculum.edu.au/parent-information/>
https://petaa.edu.au/imis_prod/w/Teaching_Resources/w/Teaching_Resources/Parents_guide.aspx
<https://theconversation.com/how-to-encourage-literacy-in-young-children-and-beyond-80459>
<https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/school-learning>

Tasmanian sources:

<https://www.education.tas.gov.au/parents-carers/parent-fact-sheets/>
<https://libraries.tas.gov.au/Pages/Home.aspx>
<https://b4.education.tas.gov.au/resources/the-b4-early-years-toolkit/>
<https://www.thebasicstasmania.com/>

UK sources:

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/covid-19-resources/support-resources-to-share-with-parents/>
<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/blog-supporting-parents-to-undertake-brilliant-book-talk/>
<http://www.wordsforlife.org.uk/5-7>

USA sources:

<https://improvingliteracy.org/topic/beginning-reading>
<https://improvingliteracy.org/topic/dyslexia>
<https://improvingliteracy.org/brief/supporting-your-childs-literacy-development-home>
<https://improvingliteracy.org/brief/understanding-screening-overall-screening-and-assessment>
<https://improvingliteracy.org/brief/advocating-my-childs-literacy-needs>

This is fact sheet #7 (out of 11), produced as part of the
“Review of Literacy Teaching, Training, and Practice in Government Schools”
and is intended to align with the Department of Education Literacy Plan for Action 2019-2022.

<https://publicdocumentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/Literacy-Plan-for-Action-2019-2022.pdf>

For information about the review, other fact sheets and five detailed reports, see:

<https://www.utas.edu.au/underwood-centre/research/completed-projects>

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Launched in 2015, the Peter Underwood Centre is a partnership between the University of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Government in association with the Office of the Governor of Tasmania.

