

WHO ME?

DEVELOP LITERACY SKILLS IN YOUNG CHILDREN?!

Yes, this job belongs to us all. Children who enter kindergarten fully ready to learn do better throughout their school years and beyond.

The good news is parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends and neighbors already have much of the expertise needed to help develop literacy skills in young children. What's more, adults may actually have a lot of fun in the process.

Children develop literacy skills in five main ways: playing, reading, writing, talking and listening. Of these, *talking and listening* are most fundamental to future literacy. Much of literacy learning happens through shared verbal interactions with adults—the main thing children need each day is time interacting with adults.

COMMUNICATION TIPS FOR TALKING AND LISTENING WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

- **Keep talking:** Start talking right from the day a child is born and continue. The more you talk, the more language and vocabulary a child learns. Talk about your day, what you are doing, and what you see in the world around you. Notice and respond to what a child says and does. The most important aspect is the amount of time adults spend interacting with a child. Talking to children more has a lasting impact on how children perform in school.

- **Listen:** Make conversations a shared activity with the adult and child contributing. Say something, and then wait for a response. Be patient, it may take some time. With babies, you may even need to wait up to 30 seconds for a response! A child must take time to hear what has been said, process the language to form an image in his/her mind, decide what to say or do in response, and then respond with an utterance or action. So, ask, then listen...

and wait... and listen... and wait.

Sometimes you may need to repeat what you said slower and encourage a response with your eyes. This is especially true if the child is in a pattern of being talked *to* rather than interacted *with* or is under two years of age.

- **Answer a question with question:** Young children seek verbal communication with adults. One year olds hand over a toy and look expectantly for a response. Two year olds say "What's dis" with the object or "Where going?" Three to five year olds use full length questions or the endless one word, "Why". Usually these young children have an idea as to the answer and it can be very enjoyable to find out what he or she thinks. So, start by returning the question. "I don't know... what is this?" or "Why do you think that may be?" and listen for a response. Use these interactions to stimulate thinking by pondering, discovering, and discussing things together.

- **Repeat! Repeat! Repeat!** Repetition is critical. Tell the same stories, repeat the same rhymes, and sing the same songs again and again. Interact and expand on ideas, sounds and songs from a child's favorite stories, books, and videos. Also, the more of a child's senses are used, the more learning will take place. Dance while singing, slowly sing the A, B, Cs while making the letters in rice on a tray, and draw a picture with the word written next to it. Repetition helps children gain language and is how they find out about their family and culture.

- **Enhance and expand:** If a 12 month old says, "Ba" for "ball", say, "Yes! Ball! That is a red ball. I like to bounce the ball." and then bounce it. Or, give one part instructions such as "Bring me the ball!" and wait. They may just do it!



• **Let the child lead:** Allow the child time to guide the interaction. Sometimes if you just sit at the child's level and in his/her space, the child will feel encouraged to lead the way. Sometimes you do not need to actually *do* anything but be available.

• **Tap into interests and uniqueness:** Think about what the child likes to do or enjoy and expand on it. Early support and encouragement of a child's interests was found to be the key for successful and gifted artists and athletes.

• **Build in daily routines:** In addition to building literacy, routines provide stability and help ease transitions for young children. Provide consistency with special statements, rhymes or songs to mark switches of activities each day. Songs like the "clean up" song, lullabies, "This is the way, we comb our hair, comb our hair, comb our hair..." can help children follow a routine. Diapering, baths, food preparation, dressing, and car trips are all opportunities for conversation. Built in positive interactions encourage brain development and are building blocks to literacy.

Keep interactions fun and interesting. Show excitement and interest in young children and continue to engage them in talking and listening. Research consistently shows that children who spend a lot of time engaged in talking and listening with adults, build the vocabulary, skills, and literacy abilities needed to succeed in school. This is something we all can do for the children we know and for our community.

RAELENE OSTBERG is the business liaison for the First Steps Business Alliance, which is an initiative of the Rochester Area Foundation. Raelene is a parent educator and working mother invested in bringing helpful information to working parents in the Rochester area.

SEEDS OF EARLY LITERACY

Parent (and Grandparent) Training

A special course was developed last year through a grant from IBM. This series of four, one-hour seminars for parents and grandparents what they can easily do to help the young children in their families get ready to read. The course received enthusiastic support from the IBM employees who took it during their lunch hour at work. It is now available to other employers. Contact First Steps at the Rochester Area Foundation if you are interested in having this course at your place of employment.

Is Your Child Care Provider Trained?

Over 100 of the licensed child care providers in Olmsted County have completed a specialized 17 hour course, SEEDS of Early Literacy, which has trained providers in how to incorporate early literacy activities into their child care services. Those who have taken the training report that they are using what they have learned with the children in their care and are very positive about how it is helping children get ready for school. Ask your child care provider if she had taken the training. Courses for providers are still available through Child Care Resource and Referral.

FIRST STEPS WORK AND FAMILY LIFE SEMINARS

Balancing work and family life is a challenge for most families, as well as employers, who say that it's the number one issue affecting work performance. Fortunately, there are strategies that can help and training available to you, including training at your work site.

Contact First Steps to find out how you can participate by calling 507-282-1027 or sending an email to info@rochesterrarea.org.

To obtain community resources and information for raising children who will thrive in school:

- Attend PAIR classes. Find more information at <http://www.rochester.k12.mn.us/>
- Go to your public library!
Library event information can be found at rochesterpubliclibrary.org/kids
- When your child turns 3, complete an early childhood "check-in." Call 285-8585 for more information.
- Advocate for work-life seminars in your work place.

Access online resources

- <http://www.rochesterfamilies.com>
- Child Care Resource and Referral at <http://www.c2r2.org/>
- <http://www.parentsknow.state.mn.us>
- www.workingfamilyresourcecenter.org
- www.zerotothree.org
- www.firststeps.us
- www.bornlearning.org
- <http://education.umn.edu/ceed/publications/questionsaboutkids/>
- www.civitas.org
- www.pbs.com/caregivers

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