

# Emergent Literacy

## What is Emergent Literacy?

Children don't learn to read overnight. In fact, the process of learning to read and write is a slow one, evolving and maturing over years. Starting in the early years of childhood, it begins with things like:

- ★ The ability to identify letters, numbers and shapes,
- ★ The awareness of sounds
- ★ Understanding some common print concepts (for example, print generally goes from left to right and from top to bottom)

The term **emergent literacy** is used to describe a variety of early behaviors and skills associated with successful reading and writing development. These fundamental skills, which develop during the first five years of life, contribute to a child's foundations for literacy and learning

## Why Emergent Literacy Matters

**Emergent literacy matters because it forms the foundation for future learning, which is important to achieving success in school and social settings.**

Here are just a few reasons why it is never too early to help promote literacy skills through everyday interactions with your child:

- ★ Vocabulary knowledge at kindergarten is strongly related to 7th grade reading skills.
- ★ Children with better language skills are less likely to have behavior problems from kindergarten to 3rd grade.



- ★ There is an 88% chance that children behind in literacy during 1st grade will remain behind when they reach 4th grade.

This does not mean that your job as a parent is to teach your child to read and write before their first day of kindergarten. But you can help lay the foundation for literacy through your everyday interactions with your child. It is that easy- smiling at your newborn, babbling with your baby, counting with your toddler, pointing out words on signs and cereal boxes with your preschooler – all of these simple, every day moments are some of the most important ways you can prepare your child for success in school and in life.

### What to Expect, and When

#### At three to four years, most children can:

- ★ Make themselves understood to strangers, despite some pronunciation errors.
- ★ Speak sentences of five or six words.
- ★ Tell stories.
- ★ Use more complex grammar, such as plurals and past tense.
- ★ Understand sentences involving time concepts (for example, “Grandma is coming tomorrow”) and describe past experiences.
- ★ Understand size comparisons such as big and bigger.
- ★ Understand the concept of same and different.
- ★ Understand relationships expressed by “if... then” or “because” sentences.
- ★ Follow a series of two to four related directions, such as “Please pick up the blocks and put them in this box.”
- ★ Sing a song and repeat at least one nursery rhyme.

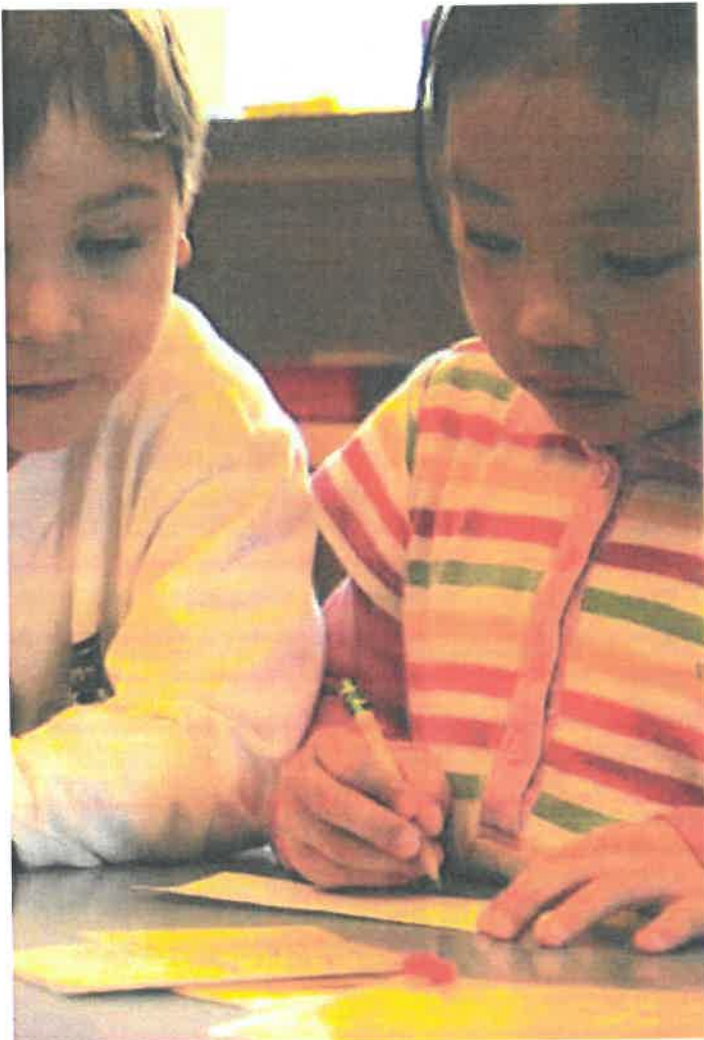
#### At four to five years, most children can:

- ★ Combine multiple thoughts into one sentence.
- ★ Ask “when?” “how?” and “why?” questions.
- ★ Use words like “can,” “will,” “should,” and “might.”
- ★ Refer to cause and effect by using “because” and “so.”
- ★ Follow three unrelated commands appropriately.
- ★ Understand comparatives like loud, louder, loudest.
- ★ Use future tense.
- ★ Say name and address.
- ★ Listen to and tell longer stories (but may misinterpret the facts).
- ★ Understand sequencing of events when clearly explained (for example, “First we plug the drain, then we run the water, and finally we take a bath”).

### What Parents Can Do

There are many ways parents and caregivers can promote children’s language development during the preschool years. Here are a few suggestions:

- ★ **CREATE A HOME LIBRARY.** Collect books and magazines from bookstores, garage sales, or use the school or public library.
- ★ **READ BOOKS TOGETHER.** Ask questions as you read, and give your child time to respond. When reading: clarify/explain the harder words; explain new words; describe new ideas, concepts; provide exposure to the structure of stories.
- ★ **ACT OUT STORIES OR POEMS WITH YOUR CHILD.** Ask her to think about how characters might be feeling or why they may act the way they do.
- ★ **PLAY RHYMING GAMES,** sing rhyming songs, and read nursery rhymes with your child.
- ★ **TELL STORIES.** Tell stories about your family, your childhood, or anything that you are interested in sharing.
- ★ **ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO LISTEN TO THE DIFFERENT SOUNDS IN WORDS.** For example, say your child’s name and ask him to think of other words that start with the same sound: Danny- dish, dog, dinner.
- ★ **COLOR, WRITE, AND DRAW WITH YOUR CHILD.** Give him the materials needed (paper, crayons, colored pencils etc.), then ask your child to tell you about his creation.



# Phonemic Awareness Activities



GRADES  
**K-1**

## Reading Activities for the Home

- Play **"I Spy"** with your child, but instead of giving a color, say, "I spy something that starts with /b/" or "I spy something with these sounds /d/, /ð/, /g/." Have your child do the same.
- Play a game in which you say a word and your child has to break apart all of the sounds. Ask your child to stretch out a word like dog and he/she can pretend to stretch a word with a rubber band. You child should say /d/ /ð/ /g/.
- Play the **"Silly Name Game"**. Replace the first letter of each family member's name with a different letter. For example: *Tob* for *Bob*, *Watt* for *Matt*, etc.
- Say a sentence aloud and ask your child to determine how many words were in the sentence.
- Explain that rhymes are words that sound the same at the end.
  - Read books containing rhymes over and over again.
  - As you read, have your child complete the rhyming word at the end of each line.
  - Orally provide pairs of words that rhyme and pairs that do not rhyme (for example: pan/man, pat/boy). Ask, "Do *pan* and *man* rhyme? Why? Do *pat* and *boy* rhyme? Why not?"
  - Prompt your child to produce rhymes. Ask, "Can you tell me a word that rhymes with *cake*?"
  - Sing rhyming songs like "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" or "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star".



Adopted from the  
Mississippi Department of Education  
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## Phonemic Awareness Activities—continued



- Give your child a small car (such as a Matchbox car). Write a three to four letter word on a piece of paper with the letter spaced apart. Have your child drive the car over each letter saying the letter sound. Have your child begin driving the car slowly over the letters and then drive over them again slightly faster. Continue until the word is said at a good rate.
- To help your child segment (separate) sounds in words:
  - Give your child three to five blocks, beads, bingo chips, or similar items. Say a word and have your child move an object for each sound in the word.
    - Play **Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes** with sounds. Say a word and have your child touch his/her head for the first sound, shoulders for the second sound, and knees for the third, while saying each sound.
    - **Jump for Sounds:** Say a word and have your child jump for each sound in the word while saying the sound.



# Phonics Activities



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**K-1**

## Reading Activities for the Home



- Make letter sounds and have your child write the letter or letters that match the sounds.
- Play word games that connect sounds with syllables and words. (For example, "If the letters 'p-e-r' spell *pen*, how do you spell *hen*?")
- Write letters on cards. Hold up the cards one at a time and have your child say the sounds. (For example, the /d/ sound for the letter *d*)
- Teach your child to match the letters in his/her name with the sounds in his/her name.
- Point out words that begin with the same letter as your child's name. (For example, *John* and *jump*)  
Talk about how the beginning sounds of the words are alike.
- Use alphabet books and guessing games to give your child practice in matching letters and sounds. A good example is the game, "I am thinking of something that starts with /t/."
- Write letters on pieces of paper and put them in a paper bag. Let your child reach into the bag and take out letters. Have your child say the sounds that match the letters.
- Take a letter and hide it in your hand. Let your child guess in which hand is the letter. Then show the letter and have your child say the letter name and make the sound. (For example, the letter *m* matches the /m/ sound as in *man*.)
- Make letter sounds and ask your child to draw the matching letters in cornmeal or sand.
- Take egg cartons and put a paper letter in each slot until you have all of the letters in the alphabet in order. Say letter sounds and ask your child to pick out the letters that match those sounds.
- Building words: Using magnetic letters, make a three-letter word on the refrigerator (*cat*). Have your child read the word and use it in a sentence. Every day, change one letter to make a new word. Start by changing only the beginning letter (*cat*, *bat*, *hat*, *sat*, *mat*, *rat*, *pat*). Then change only the ending letter (*pat*, *pal*, *pad*, *pan*). Finally, change only the middle letter (*pan*, *pen*, *pin*, *pun*).



# Phonics Activities—continued



- Making Words:** For this game, you will need magnetic letters and three bags. Put half of the consonants into the first bag. Put the vowels into the middle bag, and put the remaining consonants into the last bag. Have your child pull one letter from the first bag. That will be the first letter of his/her word. Then have your child pull from the vowel bag for the second letter of the word and from the other consonant bag for the third letter of the word. Next, the child will read the word and decide if it is a real word or a nonsense word. Take turns, replacing the vowels as needed until there are no more consonants left.
- Labeling Words:** When reading with your child, keep Post-it® notes handy. Every so often, have your child choose one object in the picture and write the word on a Post-it®. Put the note in the book to read each time you come to that page.
- Practicing Words with Pictures:** Choose pictures from a magazine or catalog. Say the name of the picture; have your child say the sound that the picture begins with and the name of that letter.
- Hunting for Words:** Choose a letter and have your child hunt for five items beginning with that letter sound. As each object is found, help your child write the word on a list. For example, if the target sound is *m*, the child might find and write *mop*, *mat*, *Mom*, *money*, and *microwave*.
- Hints for helping your child sound out words:
  - **First Sound:** Have your child say the first sound in the word and make a guess based on the picture or surrounding words. Double-check the printed word to see if it matches the child's guess.
  - **Sound and Blend:** Have your child say each sound separately (*sss*, *aaa*, *t*) This is called sounding it out. Then say the sounds together (*sat*). This is "blending".
  - **Familiar Parts:** When your child starts reading longer words, have him notice the parts of the word that he already knows. For example in a word such as *presenting*, your child may already know the prefix *pre-*, the word *sent*, and the word ending *-ing*.
- Teach your child to recognize the letters in his or her name.



# Phonics Activities—continued

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- Use magnetic letters to spell words on the refrigerator or to spell names of family members or friends.
- Discuss how names are similar and different.
- Recognizing shapes is the beginning of recognizing the features of letters. Have your child sort letters by tall tails, short tails, hooks, humps, and circles. Your child can continue to sort by feature combinations as well (For example: circle and tall tails, hooks and circles, humps and tall tails, etc.)
- Ask your child to name stores, restaurants, and other places that have signs. This is called environmental print. Have your child cut the images of these signs from bags, take-out containers, and fliers and post them somewhere to make an Environmental Print Word Wall.
- Ask your child to look through ads to point out things he/she recognizes. Ask if they know any of the letters on the page.
- Use stores as an opportunity for learning! Ask questions like, "Can you find something that has a letter *c*? Can you find a word that begins with an *m*? Can you find something with four letters?" Praise all efforts and keep it like a game.
- Make alphabet letters out of Play-doh®.
- Write letters with your finger on your child's back and have him or her guess the letter. Have your child do the same to you.
- Play "Memory" or "Go Fish" using alphabet cards.
- Read alphabet books to your child and eventually ask him/her to name the items on the page that you know he/she can successfully tell you.



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# Vocabulary Activities



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## Reading Activities for the Home



- Read Aloud:** Continue to read aloud to your child even after he/she is able to read independently. Choose books above your child's level because they are likely to contain broader vocabulary. This way, you are actually teaching him/her new words and how they are used in context.
- Preview Words:** Before reading to or with your child, scan through the book, choose two words that you think might be interesting or unfamiliar to your child. Tell your child what the words are and what they mean. As you read the book, have your child listen for those words.
- Hot Potato (Version 1):** Play Hot Potato with synonyms. Choose a word, and then your child has to think of another word that means the same thing. Take turns until neither player can think of another word. For example, you may say, *cold*, and your child might say, *freezing*. Then you could say, *chilly*, and so on. Try the game again with antonyms (opposites).
- Hot Potato (Version 2):** Play Hot Potato with categories. For younger children, the categories can be simple: pets, clothes, family members. For older children, the categories can be quite complex: the Revolutionary War, astronomy, math terms.
- Word Collecting:** Have each family member be on the look out for interesting words that they heard that day. At dinner or bedtime, have everyone share the word they collected and tell what they think it means. If the child shares an incorrect meaning, guide him/her to the correct meaning. Try to use some of the words in conversation.
- Introduce your child to a variety of experiences to help build background knowledge he/she can use while making sense of print by taking him/her to the park, museums, the zoo, etc.
- Discuss opposites (antonyms).



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# Vocabulary Activities—continued



GRADES

K-1

## Reading Activities for the Home

- Discuss positional words such as beside, below, under, over, etc. Make it into a game at dinner by asking your child to place his/her fork in different places in relation to his/her plate. For example, "Put your fork above your plate."
- Use the language of books such as author, title, illustrator, title page, etc.
- Discuss ordinal words such as *first, last, beginning, middle, etc.*
- Talk about how things are similar/alike as well as how things are different. For example, "How is a dog like a cat? How is a dog different from a cat?"
- Use a variety of words to describe feelings and emotions. For example, the way your child feels when he/she is happy. You can validate his/her feelings by saying, "I'm so glad you're joyful today! You sure look happy!"
- Trips to everyday places build vocabulary. Discuss what you are doing and seeing as you are going through the store. For example, "I'm here in the bakery. I can find donuts, cookies, and bread." Ask your child, "What else do you think I can find here?"



- When you read a book about a topic, ask him/her to tell you all the words related to it. For example, if you read a book about a dog, he/she might say dog, puppies, toy, food, play, or leash. Add other words to help expand upon what he/she says.
- When you read a book, ask your child to identify categories for words he/she has read. For example, if you read a book about pumpkins, you could put the words pumpkin, leaf, stem, and seeds into a category about the parts of a plant.



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