

Helping Your Child to Develop Language & Literacy Skills

1. Talk to your children, often and about everything. Encourage them to think about why things happen, what might happen in different circumstances, your own thoughts and feelings, and theirs. Give them new words when opportunities arise, and discuss how words go together, have similar meanings or different meanings. Encourage them to ask if they don't know what a word or phrase means.
2. Play games, e.g. Go Fish, Memory, Trouble, I Spy, My Grandmother went to Market, Charades, Junior Scrabble, Pictionary, etc. These give children the chance to interact, learn more language, follow rules, take turns, lose gracefully, win gracefully and have FUN.
3. Read stories to your children every day. These can be old favourites, or new ones from school or the local library. Begin by reading the title and author, and talking about the cover picture and what they think the story might be about. While reading the story, make comments and ask questions that help their understanding and appreciation, e.g. "What do you think will happen next? He looks sad; I would be sad too if that happened to me." After the story discuss whether your child liked it or not, why, what parts were the best, or how they think the story should change.

Don't stop when your child is beginning to read by himself. Early reading books are short and simple, and will not give your child the same amount exposure to enriched language as you can by reading to them.

4. LIMIT the time your children spend on iPads, smart phones, TV and other electronic devices. These should not replace face-to-face conversations.

Choose carefully the apps they have access to, and try to use these interactively by playing with them and talking about what is happening.

Keep tablets/phones away from your children most of the time, to be used only when given permission. It is best if YOU own the device, not your child.

5. Model correct speech sounds and grammar when you notice errors, e.g. "You mean he broke the car." "Yes, I hurt my thumb". Although you shouldn't correct your child's speech frequently, it's alright to occasionally give them help. Giving a choice can be a good way to do this, e.g. "Is it she's fault or her fault?" They will be more likely to say it correctly if you emphasise the correct word slightly.
6. Give comments about language using adult terms. E.g. "That's a long word; it has lots of sounds in it." "I'm not sure what you mean – can you say that sentence in a different way?" "That's a funny question to ask!" Don't assume your child knows what these words mean, as they are abstract and often not explained.
7. Provide experience with rhyme, through books, games and songs. Sing old-fashioned nursery rhymes. Read silly Dr Seuss books and try to make up strings of rhyming words and nonsense words. See if they can guess the last word on a page in a rhyming book.
8. Talk about SOUNDS, e.g. "Your name begins with the sound 'mmm'. Let's find some more things (in a picture book or looking around the room) that start with 'mmm'". "Do these words start with the same sound - sand, water?" Discover which sounds are "long" (e.g. f, m, s, l, sh, ee, oo) and which ones are "short" (e.g. p, b, t, d, k, g).
9. If your child is keen to write, refer to the sound as well as the letter name, e.g. "I can hear 'sss', so we will use the letter 'S' to write the 'sss' sound". Other than for the beginning of names, write in lower case lettering. Find out from the Teacher which font the children are learning, and use that consistently.
10. Show your children how literacy is used on a daily basis. Let them see you reading a book, newspaper or magazine, writing a shopping list or a note, following a recipe, keeping a diary, etc. Alert them to signs in the community giving information, instructions or names of shops or businesses.

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