

How to Reinforce Literacy Skills During Your Child's Day

Learn how to give children the best head start in gaining literacy skills with Jodi Schreck, our Executive Vice President of Education. Jodi joined our organization in 1997 and leads our Education team. Jodi has served as teacher, trainer, and leader in the public and private school sectors. Her 35 years of experience spans early childhood, K12, special education, and education leadership.



Hi Jodi! Why is it crucial to start reinforcing literacy concepts in early childhood?

Jodi: During the early years, children soak up knowledge like sponges! It is at this time that the brain is making a myriad of connections. It's amazing how much they can learn and remember. Early exposure to language and literacy sets the stage for success. Our youngest learners are listening all of the time, building their auditory vocabulary, learning sounds within words, and making meaning of words. Soon, they connect sounds to printed letters. Children immersed in environments abundant with language typically demonstrate heightened speech aptitude and enhanced phonics skills.

How do our teachers create a literacy-rich environment in their classrooms?

Jodi: Our teachers promote communication skills and early literacy skills as they talk with, read to, and sing along with their students. Students learn that reading and writing are important as they see their teachers using these skills in everyday life. As teachers share various forms of literature, they model fluent reading, how to get questions answered, and comprehension strategies. They develop students' love of writing by providing opportunities for them to convey their ideas within authentic writing tasks. Our students have opportunities to "read the room". An environment filled with printed words introduces vocabulary and helps students construct meaning. Our classrooms are filled with books, calendars, weather charts, classroom job charts, and more. Everywhere they look, students can see printed text.

How can families create a literacy-rich environment at home?

Jodi: Place books not only in your child's bedroom but also in other areas of the home, such as the living room and kitchen. Children often learn through observation, so the more they witness their parents reading, the more likely they are to explore books themselves. Chore charts, weekly menus, or morning/bedtime schedules can also be beneficial. Ensure these visuals contain both pictures and words and involve your child in reading them together. When you read to or with your child, track words with your index finger and allow your child to explore certain words, sounds, or phrases. Make age-appropriate magnetic letters, alphabet puzzles, writing materials, and paper easily available for your child. These are all fun ways to further encourage literacy exploration.

How can families incorporate literacy into daily routines?

Jodi: Regular reading sessions, particularly stories at bedtime, effortlessly introduces literacy into the home and strengthens the parent-child bond. If age-appropriate, ask your child to recall events or parts of the story. This helps children recognize that stories have a beginning, middle, and end.

While cooking, ask your child to “read” you the name of familiar foods in your pantry and refrigerator. You can also provide empty food containers in their play areas, name the items for them, and ask them to name them.

Simply engaging your child in conversation and asking them to tell you a story is such a powerful tool for strengthening their speaking skills. Even toddlers have plenty to say when you ask them. Although it may sound like gibberish, play along with the conversation!

In your experience, what are some of the most rewarding outcomes you’ve seen when children are engaged in literacy-focused activities at a young age?

Jodi: One of the most rewarding outcomes is witnessing a child’s newfound confidence and excitement for learning. When children discover the joy of reading and writing, it ignites a passion for learning that stays with them throughout their educational journey.

I’ve also seen how literacy activities help children develop essential communication skills, such as expressing themselves clearly and understanding others’ perspectives. As children immerse themselves in stories, they learn to articulate their thoughts and emotions in a way they couldn’t before.

Are there specific types of books that are especially beneficial for young children?

Jodi: Look for books with illustrations of familiar things, actions, and events in your child’s life. Simple and vibrant board books are best for our earliest readers. As your child enters toddlerhood, you can hone in on their interests and reading books about those. For example, if your toddler loves the garbage truck or mail carrier, read books about vehicles or community jobs. If your child loves their dog, find books about this special bond. Rhyming books, books with repetitive text, and books with predictable outcomes are common favorites.

Don’t underestimate the value of reading your child’s favorite book over and over again! In addition to the power of bonding, predicting events and patterns within language, and vocabulary building, are some of the other benefits that come with recycling words. Words never get old!