



Early Literacy: Questions & Answers

The Haldimand-Norfolk Preschool Speech and Language Program will soon be taking a BIGGER role in literacy. Because of our role in identifying late talkers and kids with speech delays, we are in a good position to intervene in the area of literacy. We can help you learn the same techniques. Watch for some training opportunities near you!

Q: What is early literacy?

A: The skills and attitude that result in later learning to read and write. The skills include:

- Oral language (e.g., being able to understand and use language).
- Alphabet knowledge.
- Print concepts (e.g., knowing the difference between print and pictures).

All children differ in their language ability. Some find it easier to learn and use language than others. Many children have little experience or opportunities to learn to use language or print. Many have few positive experiences around books or other literacy materials. We adults are in a unique position to influence a child's skills and attitudes. We can expose them to materials, and demonstrate a positive attitude towards literacy.

Q: How does early literacy develop?

A: Oral language development begins at birth. Children who are late talkers are at risk for the social problems associated with language delay. They are also at risk for later academic problems, including learning to read. Age of first word-use is a very important milestone, related to later literacy!

As toddlers and preschoolers are being exposed to books, they are **developing their attitudes** toward literacy. They are becoming **aware of print** and recognizing it within the community (e.g., a stop sign). We adults can help "socialize" them to books by allowing them to play with books and discover what is inside

them. It may mean allowing them to build a road with the books, or hide toys under them, or it may mean they want to sit with you and listen.



Between ages three and seven, children begin to learn the alphabet, recognize letters and associate them with their corresponding sound (e.g., "f" makes fffff). As well, they begin to develop their **phonological awareness skills**. For example, they learn how to explicitly manipulate language through rhyme (cat, hat, dat), rhythm (chikka chikka boom boom!), sound awareness (Hey, fffinger! That word starts with a ffff-sound) and how to blend sounds to form a word (c-at. Cat!). Explicit instruction (as in the examples above) is very important!

As children move beyond Grade 2, literacy development shifts from learning to read to reading to learn and comprehend the world around them.

Q: How can I help my child?

A: There are many ways:

- Read nursery rhymes and sing songs to teach your child that language can be manipulated in fun ways. (*Shaun Shaun bo Baun! I like to eat, eat, eat, apples and bananas. I like to oot, oot, oot, ooples and banoonoos! Stinkarama grandma! Nathan the red-nosed reindeer!*).

- Draw attention to words that sound alike. For example, “pot” and “pan” both start with “p” or “cat” rhymes with “hat.”
- Go on a sound treasure hunt. Try to find all the things you can that start with a particular sound.
- Label common items in your home (e.g., chair, table, window) with index cards. Point out the words to your child.
- Point out words on familiar packages or logos. For example, point out the words on your child’s favourite morning cereal box or the logo of his/her their favourite restaurant.
- Point out the title of the book and words in a book as you read. Follow them with your finger to show your child that words are read from top to bottom and left to right.
- Point out your child’s initials in books and on logos in the community.
- Talk about the book before you begin to read it. Look at the front cover and ask your child what he/she thinks the story might be about. Make up your own story and see how closely yours matches.
- Talk about stories after you have read them. Change the story to have different events or endings. Re-read familiar and favourite books again and again.



- Be creative. Make your own books. Buy a small notebook or scrapbook and glue in pictures of your child’s favourite things from magazines (e.g., Dora, Bob the builder, balloons, trucks etc.). If your child is older, write the names under the pictures and point out the words to him or her.
- Look at photo books together and talk about what each person is doing in the pictures. Write their names under the pictures and point them out to your child.
- Add pictures to existing books. If you have a flap book, hide a picture of your child or mommy/daddy/grandma etc. under the flap. Let the child explore the book and find the picture.
- Use your imagination. Pretend to feed characters in the book or eat the food that you see in a picture.
- Bring the book to life. Use gestures and actions to help the child understand the story. Act it out or use props or pictures that can accompany the book. Some examples include:
 - Hungry Caterpillar – use pretend food or a stuffed caterpillar or butterfly as you tell the story.
 - Old Hat New Hat – dig out all kinds of hats from around the house and talk about them as you read the story. Make your own hat as well.

Q: What if I think my child or a child in my program has a language or speech delay?

A: Don’t “wait and see!” Call the Parent Info Line at 1-866-463-2759 for a referral to one of our speech-language pathologists. We have offices in Dunnville, Caledonia, Simcoe, Delhi and Langton.

Q: What if my child isn’t interested in books?

A: Some children will sit and look at books for hours while others will never touch them. If your child is not interested in sitting and reading a book with you, there are some things you can do to capture his/her interest.

Q: How can I learn more about early literacy?

A: Come to a workshop! We will be offering our “Language and Literacy Workshop” four times a year at a location near you! If you are an early learning provider or program provider, you should call us for a “Stories in Circle” session.

HNPSLP 519-426-6170 Ext. 3243

Updated January 2014



www.hnhu.org • info@hnhu.org

Simcoe
PO. Box 247, 12 Gilbertson Drive
Simcoe, ON N3Y 4L1
519.426.6170 / 905.318.6623

Langton
22 Albert Street
Langton, ON N0E 1G0
519.875.4485

Caledonia
282 Argyle Street South
Caledonia, ON N3W 1K7
905.318.5367

Dunnville
117 Forest St. E.
Dunnville, ON N1A 1B9
905.774.3333

