

How literacy develops (0-6 years)

Developing literacy

Literacy is commonly understood as reading and writing. But before children can read and write, they need to learn about sounds, words, language, books and stories, so literacy development starts as early as your child's birth.

Why is it important to encourage your child's literacy development?

Literacy is the foundation for doing well at school. We need reading and writing for socialising, developing independence, managing money and working.

You can help your child develop the building blocks for literacy – the ability to speak, listen, understand, watch and draw. You can also help her learn about the connection between letters on a page and spoken sounds. For these things to happen, your child needs plenty of experience with:

- pictures and objects – how you can use words to talk about them.
- letters and words – their shapes, sounds and names.
- sounds – how words can rhyme, begin and end with the same letters, be broken up into parts like syllables, and so on.

Tips to help your child develop literacy

You can help with your child's early literacy development by:

- communicating with your child.
- reading together.
- playing with rhyme and other sounds with your child.

Communicating

Back-and-forth **communication** with your baby helps develop her speaking, listening and understanding as she gets older. Later on, communication shows your child you are interested in her, which encourages her to communicate.

What you can do:

- Copy your baby's noises, and do not be afraid to use baby talk. This is when you speak more slowly, let your voice rise and fall, and repeat and emphasise words. This helps your baby understand how language is put together.
- Talk with your child about the everyday things you are doing and seeing together. For example, 'Let's get the washing now' or 'Yum, what a nice lunch we're having'.

- Share stories with your child – for example, share stories from your childhood. You could take turns creating a story together.
- Sing with your child and encourage her to sing along or help her pat to the rhythm.
- Listen to your child and talk about things she brings up. If she asks a question, give her the chance to come up with answers. For example, if your child says, ‘What’s that box there?’ you could say, ‘What do you think it is?’
- As your child’s vocabulary expands and she begins to read words, let her hear and see lots of new words in books, on TV or in general conversation, and talk about what the words mean.

Reading

Reading often with your child from an early age helps her develop a solid foundation for literacy. What you can do:

- Choose interactive books like lift-the-flap books and touch-and-feel books for babies and young children.
- Encourage your child to hold the book and turn the pages. This helps her understand that the book should be a certain way up, and that pages are always turned in the same direction.
- Point out each word as you read it. This shows your child that we always start on the left and move to the right when reading English. You could ask, ‘Where should I start reading on this page?’
- Point out pictures and talk about the pictures your child points to.
- Let older children choose books to read with you. They might choose books about their special interests, like ballet or weather.
- Keep reading to your child even when she can read for herself.

Rhyming

Rhyming games help children listen to beginning and ending sounds – for example, ‘cat, pat and mat’. What you can do:

- Play games that involve rhyming. Make up silly rhymes to use during routines, like ‘Go to bed and lay down your head’.
- Play games that involve the sound and rhythm of words. You could try ‘I spy’ and tongue twisters like ‘She sells seashells by the seashore’.
- Read rhyming books like *The Cat in the Hat* by Dr Seuss.



Recommended Reads by the National Library Board

For some suggestions on rhymes, click [here](#) to download a booklet on rhymes!

Recommended Reads

- [Biff's fun phonics](#)
- [Tick tock clock: a phonics reader](#)
- [Play activities for the early years](#)

Engage your child with simple activities at home! Check out some of these things you can do together:

- [Alphabet song](#)
- [A to Z](#)
- [Name the Animals](#)
- [New Friends](#)
- [Chicka Chicka Letters](#)
- [Alphabet Trace for Kids](#)