

Ages: Birth-1

Well-Child Language and Literacy Tip Sheet



For more information, visit thereadingleague.org/compass/families-and-caregivers

Screen Time Tips

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends **no** screen-based media for children under 2 years, except for video chatting.

Language Tips

Before children talk, they learn receptive language—the sounds of their home language, cadence of voices, and structure of conversation.

Babies learn when you talk with them!

- Talk to your baby throughout the day about what you are seeing and doing:
“I’ll get you ready to go for a walk outside. Here’s your little coat - let’s put your arm through! Here’s a soft green hat; I’ll put it on your head.”
- Respond to the little noises your baby makes.
- When your baby is wide-awake, ask them questions. Even though they can’t talk yet, make eye contact, pause like you’re waiting for an answer, and then give a response.
- To build vocabulary, point to and name everyday objects the baby is near. Use real words, not “baby talk.”



Soft Photo Albums

- Put pictures of relatives, friends, and caregivers in a simple album.
- Talk to your baby about all the people who love them and are part of their family and/or community.

Activity Tips

Sing to your child. Children love rhyme and rhythm, and songs can bring comfort and joy to your home.

Check with your local school district about Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) classes, which are helpful for both parents and children!



Picture Cards for Babies

- High contrast is interesting to the baby.
- Tell your baby about the patterns, colors, and shapes you see.
- Can be used during tummy time.

Pre-Literacy Skill Tips

Have baby-safe books on straps to attach to strollers and car seats so babies can get used to handling books themselves.

Read to your baby every day to develop a routine.



Baby Safe Books

- Non-toxic board books are made with your baby in mind. They hold up to teeth, moisture, and crumpling.

Literacy Development Milestones

- Responds to your voice during shared book reading (e.g., by smiling, cooing, or turning their head).
- Looks at or shows interest in pictures or books.
- Enjoys read-aloud and singing time with caregivers.
- Makes sounds or facial expressions during book time.

Ages: 1-2

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Screen Time Tips

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends **no** screen-based media for children under 2 years, except for video chatting.

Language Tips

Typically developing children will begin to speak this year. Notice which words they use and continue teaching them new words. It can be helpful to have your child look at your mouth when you say new words so they can see how to move their own mouth to make the correct sounds.

Is your child on track with speech? A good rule of thumb is to look for about 18 words by the time the child is 18 months old.

When your child knows about 50 words, they will likely start saying short phrases and then sentences.

When your child speaks or gestures to you, smile at them and then respond to help them begin to understand back-and-forth conversations.

Reading, saying, or singing nursery rhymes and songs will help your child to hear and play with the sounds in language. This is called phonological awareness, and it will help your child develop future reading skills.

Activity Tips

Check your local libraries for free story hours.



Music Exploration

- Music is full of patterns and repetition, plus it's fun!
- Play music, sing, and try out toddler instruments (or get creative and use household items as instruments).



Sensory Play

- Sensory play with safe items, such as flour, edible play dough, or rice, builds hand-eye coordination and provides a reason for conversation.

Pre-Literacy Skill Tips

Reading to your child can be a great addition to a morning or bedtime routine. Toddlers thrive on routine, and knowing what to expect brings comfort and helps them feel stable and in control.



Baby Safe Books

- Have baby-safe books on straps to attach to strollers and car seats so babies can get used to handling books themselves.

Literacy Development Milestones

- Points to pictures in a book when you name them.
- Attempts to say familiar words from favorite books.
- Brings books to you to read.
- Tries to turn pages in a board book (even if several at a time).

Ages: 2-3

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Screen Time Tips

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends **no more than 1 hour a day** of screen time. Ideally, this screen time would be high-quality programming that is viewed together (parent and child).

Language Tips

Listen to songs or poems that rhyme, and see if your child can notice or come up with rhyming words. Find ways to work rhymes into your conversations: *"Time to go, buffalo!"*

Activity Tips

Help your child learn to wait. A great place to do this is in line at a store. Set a great example by avoiding the urge to pick up your phone, and asking your child about what colors or shapes they see instead.



Dramatic Play

- Dramatic play gives children a chance to speak, which builds their sentence structure, grammar, and vocabulary.
- Use simple household items to set up a dramatic play area like a vet center, grocery store, ice cream shop, post office, etc. Children can play by themselves or with others. If you join in the fun, it can be a great time for back-and-forth conversations with your child!

Pre-Literacy Skill Tips

Switch out board books and picture books every week or two to keep them fresh! The library is a great place to get new books.

Read together every day. Work this into your daily routine so it becomes automatic.

Ask questions about what you read, see, hear, and wonder about. A child's ability to have back-and-forth conversations is strongly related to their brain development and I.Q.

Let your child do things to strengthen hand muscles and hand-eye coordination.

For example, use clay or Play-Doh, color with crayons, climb age-appropriate playground equipment, and roll or toss balls to each other.

When children have strong hand muscles and their eyes and hands work well together, it will make writing easier for them to learn down the road.



Alphabet Books

- Alphabet books make it easy to talk about the shape and sounds of letters.
- Children are often very interested in learning about the first sound in their names. Once they know a few letter sounds, you can point out other words with the same sound. *"Wow, I noticed that taco starts with the same sound your name starts with. Listen-Taco, Tim!"* Paying attention to the sounds in words starts getting your child's brain ready to read.



Concept Books

- Concept books explore one topic in-depth.
- Our brains store vocabulary words by how they relate to other things, so this type of book helps to make those connections.

Literacy Development Milestones

- Names pictures or objects in books without prompting.
- Finishes familiar phrases in books that have been read multiple times.
- Pretends to read or tell a story.
- Recognizes familiar signs or logos (e.g., stop sign, store logo, restaurant logo).

Ages: 3-4

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Screen Time Tips

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends limiting screen time to **1 hour a day or less**. Choose high-quality, educational shows, such as shows on PBS. Watch together when possible so you can talk about what your child is seeing.

SUGGESTED SHOWS

Reading Buddies™, Super Why, Number Blocks, Bluey, Wild Kratts

Language Tips

Register for preschool screening with your school district.

Activity Tips

Point out when you hear alliteration (words that start with the same sound).

Example: *"I picked a pink popsicle!"*

Find things in your home that start with the same sound as your child's name.

Example: Taylor and table start with the same sound.

Teach your child the letter names and their sounds. Practice them when you are reading, playing with letter magnets, etc.



Learn Through Board Games

- Board games give us real-world reasons to read, count, and practice patience through taking turns. Some board games, such as *Count Your Chickens*, teach cooperation by having all players work on the same goal.

Pre-Literacy Skill Tips

Read alphabet books, counting books, and word books. Point out letters and numbers as you read.

Point out the names of logos and signs when you're running errands. Ask your child which colors and letters they see.

Example: "There's the Target™ sign." "I see the red circles!"

Point out real-world print on food boxes, medicine bottles, shopping lists, or on a personal calendar as you count down the days until an exciting event.

Tear paper, thread beads, open and close hair clips, play with clothespins, and practice cutting with child-safe scissors to help your child build finger strength and control (fine motor skills).



Interactive Books

- Interactive books typically include flaps, pop-ups, sound effects, and/or other interactive elements that encourage tactile touch and participation.
- Read counting books and words books, pointing to the numbers and letters as you read. Point out the names of logos and signs when you're running errands. Ask your child which colors and letters they see.



Have a Wait? Bring a Book

- Keep a bin of books in the car within your child's reach to expand your read-aloud routine. They can also look at the books while you drive or if you'll have to wait at an appointment or in a restaurant.

Literacy Development Milestones

- Sits and listens to a short story from a picture book.
- Shows interest in letters, especially those in their name.
- Recognizes words that rhyme (e.g., cat, hat, bat).
- Knows how to open a book and turn pages one at a time and knows where on the page to start reading.
- Remembers some letter names and their sounds once they have been taught.

Ages: 4-5

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Screen Time Tips

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Language Tips

Expand your child's vocabulary by using unique words when you speak.

Listen to podcasts such as PBS's Molly of Denali or NPR's Wow in the World, and high-quality children's television programs like PBS's Sid the Science Kid or Super Why! that develop knowledge and words about specific topics.



Focus on Words

- Fancy Nancy books purposefully introduce and explain “fancy” words within the story, helping children to expand their vocabularies.

Activity Tips

Ask your child questions about high-interest topics that invite them to share their ideas in a back-and-forth conversation.

Example: If they are building with blocks, you might say, “*Tell me what you’re building.*” Then, comment on their response to keep the conversation going!



Books as Treats

- Consider gifting books on special occasions, such as birthdays, holidays, or the first/last day of school. Go to the library or bookstore on a day off. Read books in a fort or snuggled up on the couch. Make reading fun!

Pre-Literacy Skill Tips

Help your child practice recognizing their name in print, and talk about how the letters relate to the sounds in their name.

If your child is comfortable with letters and sounds, have them try blending sounds together words with three letters like map, sit, and tap. You can point to each letter, say the sound, then say the whole word—then have your child try. Show excitement when they read their first words, even if it is slow and takes a few tries. If they make errors, point to the word and help them in a supportive manner.

SUGGESTED BOOKS

Hop on Pop, Bob books, or other books with easy-to-read words.



Model Reading

- Read to your child often, but also let them see that reading is something you do for enjoyment.
- Is reading part of your family's culture?

Practice drawing lines, crossing lines, and making circles. Children should begin their circle at the top, then go counterclockwise to get ready to write. Once your child has mastered those, they may be ready to learn to write letters. Many children begin by writing the letters in their first name. Letters such as L and T are easier for preschoolers to write than letters with curves, such as G or J.

Literacy Development Milestones

- Understands that written words have meaning and that we read from left to right.
- Recognizes and names several letters of the alphabet and the sounds they represent.
- Tells you the beginning and ending sounds of words when prompted.
- Attempts to write their name or other familiar words.
- Answers simple questions about a story read aloud (e.g., “What happened at the end?”)

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Screen Time Tips

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Literacy Tips

- Talk about letter sounds - what do you see that starts with the sound “ssss”?
- Talk about what is the same and different in rhyming words. *“I noticed that cat, mat, and bat all sound the same at the end. Only the first sound is different!”*
- Look for decodable readers (phonics readers) at your local library or bookstore. These books help your child learn phonics patterns to build reading confidence and fluency.

Language Tips

- Make time **every day** to read aloud to your child and have your child read to you.
- When you read aloud to your child, choose storybooks and non-fiction books to help children build their vocabulary and recognize more words in print as they grow as readers.
- Encourage your child to write! This could be through a daily journal, a back-and-forth journal between parent and child, or a science observation journal where your child can draw pictures and write about what they notice in nature.



Decodable Readers

- When they first learn to read, children should read from books that contain the sound-letter patterns they have learned.



Make Reading Fun

- Play games that encourage early literacy skills such as rhyming, matching letters with their sounds, and reading simple words.

Examples can be found on [The Reading League Compass' Families and Caregivers page](#).



Set a Good Example

- Set a good example by creating a culture of reading among all of the children and adults in the home.

Literacy Development Milestones

- Breaks down words into individual sounds, or phonemes (*example: breaks “sat” into the sounds s-a-t*), and blends sounds together to make words (*example: blends s-a-t to make the word “sat”*).
- Consistently applies the correct sounds to letters when prompted
- Sounds out unfamiliar words when reading instead of using context and picture cues to guess at words.
- Spells and reads words accurately after instruction and practice.
- Reads aloud and participates in reading activities without reluctance.
- Retells a story in order (beginning, middle, and end).

If your child has difficulty with any of these milestones after they have been taught, consult with their teacher to see if they may need additional support. Early intervention is essential to your child’s academic success.

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Screen Time Tips

Limit screen time to **an hour a day**; more screen time is **linked to a higher risk of depression**. Experts **recommend** having screen-free bedrooms for children.

Literacy Tips

Plan for daily reading time: Reading builds vocabulary, knowledge, and spelling skills!

What to read? Encourage your child to read books, magazines, graphic novels, comics, manga, etc.

Read as a family: Even when children are readers, they benefit from hearing adults read aloud. Choose books that appeal to the whole family and make memories together!

Listening to audiobooks counts as reading: Try incorporating them during travel, exercise, and chores.

Choose to read during downtime: Put reading materials in your vehicle and take them with you when you know you'll have to wait.

Make reading part of your family's culture: Children who see their parents reading are more likely to become readers themselves.

Literacy Development Milestones

- Reads with accuracy and with expression.
- Spells most words correctly.
- Writes well-structured sentences and organized paragraphs.
- Summarizes a story and explains what characters feel or why events happened.
- Reads longer and more complex words fluently.
- Does not avoid reading or have low self-confidence in literacy tasks.

Suggested Resources

Free ebooks and audiobooks are available. Most libraries offer Libby, the library reading app for free! Access thousands of titles electronically.

Need a book recommendation? Each year, books are nominated for the Maud Hart Lovelace Award. Many libraries order multiple copies of each of these engaging titles.

Reading Difficulties—When to Speak With a Specialist:

- **Reading Fluency Issues:** Slow, choppy, or labored reading that impacts comprehension.
- **Poor Spelling and Writing Skills:** Difficulty with spelling patterns, organization in writing, or structuring sentences.
- **Reading Comprehension Problems:** Struggles with understanding or remembering details, summarizing, or making inferences in text.
- **Difficulty With Longer Words:** Struggles with reading more complex words that have more than one syllable.
- **Frustration with Reading:** Avoids reading and has low self-confidence in reading and writing tasks.

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Screen Time Tips

Limit screen time to **an hour a day**; more screen time is **linked to a higher risk of depression**. Experts [recommend](#) having screen-free bedrooms for children.

Literacy Tips

Help your child find books and other reading materials on topics that interest them.

Compare classic books with their modern versions.

For example, *Little Women* has recently been adapted into a more current graphic novel called *Jo: An Adaptation of Little Women (Sort of)*.

Encourage your child to write a review of a book they've read and share it with their family, other relatives, or friends.

Make it a family routine to talk about new words you read or hear each day. Thinking and talking about new words expands your vocabulary!

Literacy Development Milestones

- Exhibits the ability to read unfamiliar or complex words accurately and automatically.
- Spells accurately most of the time, particularly when spelling common words.
- Writes a paragraph and/or essay with well-organized writing and accurate sentence structure.
- Understands complex information, draws inferences, and analyzes texts.
- Knows and correctly uses a variety of vocabulary words.

Suggested Resources

Free ebooks and audiobooks are available. Most libraries offer Libby, the library reading app for free! Access thousands of titles electronically.

Need a book recommendation? Each year, books are nominated for the Maud Hart Lovelace Award. Many libraries order multiple copies of each of these engaging titles.

Reading Difficulties—When to Speak With a Specialist:

- **Difficulty With Reading Words:** Ongoing trouble sounding out new or complex words and often needs context to understand them.
- **Spelling and Writing Issues:** Continued struggles with spelling even common words, poor organization in writing, and difficulty with grammar and sentence structure.
- **Difficulty Understanding Complex Texts:** Struggles to break down text and understand things that aren't clearly explained or have deeper meanings.
- **Poor Vocabulary Development:** Limited vocabulary makes understanding and learning across subjects difficult.

Well-Child Information About Dyslexia



For more information, visit thereadingleague.org/compass/adolescent-literacy

What is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a condition that can be inherited and affects 5-10% of the population. It makes language, reading, and spelling difficult because the brain has a hard time connecting speech sounds and print (letters).

While dyslexia cannot be cured, early intervention is key to helping children with dyslexia learn to read and spell well. If a close family member has dyslexia or struggled to learn to read and spell, watch for early signs of dyslexia in your child, as it is about 40% hereditary.

Common Early Signs of Dyslexia

- Delays in speech/language development.
- Difficulty hearing rhyme and making rhymes.
- Trouble finding the right word when speaking, or mixing up the sounds within words.
- Difficulty remembering the sequence of events from a story and the sequence of numbers (such as a phone number or street address).
- Slow learning of the alphabet and numbers, often forgetting letters they previously learned.

Early Intervention for Suspected Dyslexia

- Spend a few minutes each day having your young child face you and watch your lips as you slowly say common words. Then have your child try to repeat the words.
- Listen to music with rhyming words, nursery rhymes, or rhyming poetry. Keep it fun - Raffi songs often have light-hearted rhymes, or you can make up your own!
- Help your child hear the beginning, middle, and end sounds in short words.

Example: The word sun has three sounds: **/s/**, **/u/**, and **/n/**.

Help your child listen for all three sounds by playing a game where you provide the sounds, and they tell you the word. You can also make it into a game where you give the three sounds and they tell you what the word is.

- Increase the amount of print your child is exposed to so that they have more experiences with letters and numbers, even before kindergarten.
- Pediatric specialists can help with dyslexia diagnosis.
- Speech and language therapists can help provide phonological and phonemic awareness interventions that help build the brain networks that aid reading.

Resources

[The Reading League Compass: Families and Caregivers](https://www.thereadingleague.org/compass/adolescent-literacy)

[thereadingleague.org/compass/adolescent-literacy](https://www.thereadingleague.org/compass/adolescent-literacy)

[The International Dyslexia Association](https://dyslexiaida.org)

dyslexiaida.org

[The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity](https://dyslexia.yale.edu)

dyslexia.yale.edu