

Promoting Family Literacy: Raising Ready Readers

By NCLD Editorial Staff

<http://www.getreadytoread.org/early-learning-childhood-basics/early-literacy/promoting-family-literacy-raising-ready-readers>

The research is clear: Children raised in homes that promote family literacy grow up to be better readers and do better in school than children raised in homes where literacy is not promoted. We know that promoting family literacy is important to future reading and school success, but does that mean parents should be prepared to read 100 books a week to their preschoolers? Of course not. While family literacy activities are often based in reading, there are lots of other ways families can conduct literacy activities at home through picture books, songs, poetry and storytelling.

Family literacy is defined as home literacy activities that provide literacy skill-building opportunities for young children while enhancing literacy skill development in all members of the family. While researching family literacy you will often come across terms like, "literacy-rich homes," "family-focused reading" and the importance of building strong "home-school communication." All of these components are essential for promoting family literacy activities and raising ready readers. This month's feature will provide you with ideas for promoting family literacy in your home that go beyond reading storybooks, as well as provide you with free resources to use at home or to distribute to parents in your setting or school.

Books: Key Members of Your Family

One of the easiest ways to show your child the importance of reading is to make a special place to store your child's books. Assigning a place for your child's books shows your child that books are special and deserve an organized storage place all their own. Making room on a bottom shelf of the family bookcase or placing books in a drawer within your child's reach are great ways to create a home library. Parents and family members should model how to organize books on the shelf and teach children how to handle books as a way to promote ownership of the library.

Have you ever flipped through a friend's photos and imagined a story to go along with them? Young children love to use their imaginations to create stories to go along with pictures. One of the earliest literacy skills children develop is the concept of sequencing, or telling a story from start to finish in order. One way to practice this skill at home is to create your own picture books, or books without words. Using photos, pictures from magazines or your child's drawings, books can be created and placed in the home library for easy access. Family members can "read" the story with the child by asking him or her to take them through the story. As the child gets older, family members should have the child dictate the story to them so they can write it down and then move on to encouraging the child to write the words themselves.

Storytelling: Talking about Family History and Creating New Adventures

One of the best ways to help foster family literacy in the home is to encourage all family members to engage in storytelling. Not only is storytelling a great way to share family history, it is also a great way to engage all members of the family -- especially those who are building literacy skills regardless of their age. Start by having an older member of the family tell a story about a major family event (wedding, birthday, graduation). Afterward, ask a younger member of the family to re-tell the story in his or her own words. Family members should be supportive when the child misses an important element and help the child pronounce key vocabulary words like names of relatives, locations, etc. This activity helps build

vocabulary, understand sequencing and recall information.

Writing Notes: Connecting Family and Friends

Learning to read and learning to write go hand in hand. It is important to practice and encourage emerging writing skills with young children and those new to learning a language. One way to encourage writing practice is to have family members leave notes for one another on a regular basis. Leaving a note in a lunch box, taping a note to the mirror in the hallway or slipping a note under a pillow are great ways to reinforce the importance of writing to communicate information. Children should be encouraged to send notes at every stage of their development -- from scribbles to sentences.

Another way to encourage written communication between family members is to send each other frequent e-mail messages. This is a great way to help young children keep in touch with distant relatives or friends. Working with an adult, have the child dictate or attempt to type a short message. If the child has typed the message without help, the adult can type a translation of the message underneath it. All attempts at typing and dictating should be encouraged. Engaging in a frequent email exchange with relatives and friends builds a child's letter recognition skills and provides practice organizing thoughts and ideas.

Using the Library with the Whole Family

Visiting the library together is a great way to foster family literacy activities. Not only do libraries often offer access to books on a wide range of literacy levels and subjects, libraries often have books in several languages as well. Adults and children can improve their literacy skills by reading books in the family's first language and then reading the same book in English. By doing this, family members will build vocabulary, the ability to use context clues to learn new words, and enable adults to ask the child questions about the illustrations and predict what will happen next. Families should also visit the library to connect with community literacy projects, storytelling, tutoring and reading clubs.

Learning to love to read starts at an early age and often starts at home. If families make the effort to encourage, support and engage all aspects of literacy in their homes, children and family members will enjoy reading and writing together for the rest of their lives.

Some of these tips were taken from the U.S. Department of Education's booklet, [Helping Your Child Become a Reader](#). Visit the Department of Education's ["Reading Tips for Parents"](#) online to read and order free copies of the booklet and to get additional suggestions for building family literacy at home.

Get Ready to Read! has a great [Home Literacy Checklist](#) (available in English and Spanish) that can help you or the parents you create a literacy-friendly home. Download it free today.