

A Parent's Guide to **Early Literacy**



What is Early Literacy?

Early literacy is what children know about reading and writing before they can actually read and write. Early literacy skills are the roots of reading success and it is never too early to plant the seed. Literacy is one of the specific areas of learning in which we support children's learning and development at Nursery. Please see our Parent Guide on Play-Based Learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) for more information on this.

Children prepare to read long before they enter school, however, formal reading and writing exercises pushed on a child too young can actually damage the development of literacy. Literacy at Nursery involves encouraging children to link sounds and letters and to gain early reading and writing skills in preparation for more formal learning at school, in a fun and exciting way.

How do children learn early literacy skills?

Literacy - reading and writing - is a natural progression from early communication, which can be both spoken or unspoken. Babies communicate by using a combination of gestures, facial expressions and crying to let you know what they are feeling or what they need. This ability develops the more you respond, and as children grow older they learn to communicate by talking, listening, drawing and mark-making.

The foundations of literacy are: communication and talking; fostering a love of books; and understanding that marks (such as letters and numbers), pictures and print, convey meaning.

What can you do at home to help early literacy development?

- Introduce your child to books at a very early age; let them turn the pages and talk about the pictures with them.
- Sing to (and with) your child. Singing traditional lullabies and nursery rhymes is an essential pre-cursor to the development of language.
- Spend time talking to your child at meal times, bath times and any other opportunity you have.
- Show your child the print on letters and food packaging - point out street names, shop signs and any other print in their environment.
- Let your child see your appreciation of reading and how you enjoy reading the paper or a book.
- Include your child in any writing tasks you do, for example, write a shopping list together and let them scribble at the bottom.
- Children can mark-make on more than just paper. Give them opportunities to do so, whenever possible: 'writing' in the sand at the beach or playground; making marks in play-dough; or on outside surfaces with water and brushes. Talk about the marks your child makes and treat them as real communications by giving them meaning.

Try not to focus too much on:

- **Flash cards** - the best way for children to learn to recognise words is with meaningful context. You'll notice they will quickly learn to recognise the name on their favourite cereal box, for example, because it has meaning and context for them.
- **Reading schemes** - the best way to encourage early reading skills is to foster in your child a genuine love of books. Read interesting picture books with them which stimulate their imagination.
- **Copying or tracing letters** - when children have plenty of opportunities to draw, paint and scribble, they don't need to trace letters. If they are pushed into copying writing too soon, or before they have the fine motor skills required, it may put them off.