

Four Myths About Early Literacy

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Did you know that a child's journey to literacy begins long before they start to read and write? In fact, from birth, children start to learn an important set of **early literacy** skills that lay the foundation for later reading and writing.

To help your child develop these early literacy skills, we're sharing some common myths about early literacy with you so that you know what the research really shows and have links to helpful tips.

Myth #1

Learning to read is like learning to speak.

Children learn how to speak naturally as they grow. This is because the human brain is “hard wired” for language-learning. In contrast, there is no specific area in the brain dedicated to reading. Unlike learning to speak, **learning to read does not happen naturally**. While reading is a language-based activity that develops gradually, children need to be taught how to read. To become successful readers, children need adults to help them learn how to understand print and what it means.

Myth #2

Early literacy is about knowing letters and their sounds.

Actually, children's **spoken language** is a critical part of their growing literacy skills. This is because the words that children understand and use become the words they later learn to read and write. Encouraging your child to communicate about what interests them, and having back-and-forth conversations about those interests is a great way to grow your child's vocabulary. The more knowledge a child has and the more words they know, the easier it will be for them to understand what they read later on.

Myth #3

Reading books to children is the best way to build their awareness of print.

Reading books is a very important part of encouraging early literacy, but your child won't learn about print simply by seeing it in books or in the environment. In fact, during book reading young children tend to ignore text and focus on pictures. To learn how print works, your child needs you to **intentionally point out print**. For example, tracking the words you read with your finger lets your child know that the words you're reading match the words on the page. Explaining that the print in a speech balloon tells us what a character is saying is another way to point out print – but don't overdo it! Interrupting a story too many times can make a child lose

interest. Finding one or two opportunities to talk about print during book reading is a wonderful way to help children make the connection that the writing they see has meaning and represents spoken language. **Here are some tips for pointing out print for your child.**

Myth #4

Memorizing common words helps children learn to read

You may have seen videos on social media that claim to teach babies and toddlers how to read using flashcards with words. While some young children can memorize written words, research shows that **memorization does not help children learn how to read**. In fact, children who learn words by memorizing them tend to struggle once they enter school and encounter words they haven't seen before. For children between ages three and five, it's more effective to help them understand that words are made up of sounds. This is called **sound awareness**. There are many natural opportunities to build your child's sound awareness throughout the day. For example, while at the park, turn a fun "I Spy" game into finding things that start with the same sound. If the child spies a **stone**, see if you can spy something else that starts with /s/!

To learn more about the early literacy skills your child needs to learn, and to get practical tips for building them, visit our Literacy Corner.

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For research-based strategies to build early literacy throughout the day, explore our guidebooks for parents and educators. Use code **BTS24** to save 20% until September 30th.

For Parents...

I'm Ready™! How to Prepare Your Child for Reading Success

For Educators...

ABC and Beyond™: Building Emergent Literacy Childhood Settings

References

Wright, T. S., Duke, N. K., Souto-Manning, M., & Cabell, S. Q. (2022). *Literacy learning for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers: Key practices for educators*.

Weitzman, E. & Greenberg, J. (2010). *ABC and beyond: Building emergent literacy in early childhood settings* (1st ed.). Hanen Early Language Program.

About The Hanen Centre

The Hanen Centre is a Canadian not-for-profit charitable organization committed to supporting all the important adults in young children's lives to build the best possible social, language and literacy skills. This includes children with or at risk of language delays/disorders, autistic children, and children who may benefit from social communication support.

Visit www.hanen.org for more information.

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