

**THE BUSY PARENTS'**  
**GUIDE**  
**TO**  
**USING**  
**EARLY LITERACY**  
**ACTIVITIES**



# Early Literacy Activities for Children and Parents

## A Parent's Guide to Easy Times to Do These Activities

Activities that may help your child's early reading skills—what a great idea! And activities that use play as a means of learning about books and print really sound fun. You care and want your child to grow up to be the best reader he or she can be. But when can you find the time to use these activities? You know how little time you have to set aside just for activities like these—even if they are fun and develop early reading skills. Well, if these are your thoughts, then these activities are made for you! They are perfect for you and your child:

- They are written *especially for busy parents* who work, cook, drive to and from errands, and have busy active lives.
- They are designed so that *you can do them while you are doing other things*, such as washing the dishes and driving the car.
- They are *short and easy to do*.
- They are *fun* for both children and parents.
- They *help your child learn skills* that contribute to reading.

To make them easy to use, the activities have been arranged by routines that will be familiar to every parent. So, you can pick the activities that you can do when you are busy with your hands (when you are driving the car or folding laundry) or those that are good at bedtime. Most of the activities take only a few minutes to do—so you can fit one into a trip to the grocery store, when you are waiting in the check-out line, or waiting for the microwave to heat dinner. We know that parents think that reading is very important. These short, easy activities are a parent's dream for how

## ON A WALK OR AT THE PARK

Say it Fast!; Tell Me a Word that Rhymes with . . . !; What Did You Hear?; What Will Happen Next?

## SPECIAL TRIPS

Going Places—The Library; Going Places—The Museum; Going Places—The Zoo

## ART PORTFOLIOS

Children often put a lot of effort into their drawings. Sometimes they express important things about their feelings and experiences. Why not keep these creative works and collect them in a special art portfolio file? It will be fun to look back at them later with your child and remember special events and experiences together. You can buy a cardboard art portfolio in an art supply store or use a large department store box to store the drawings, collages, and other artworks.

## DIARIES

Give your child a spiral notebook to use as a diary. On a regular basis, encourage your child to draw pictures or dictate some comments about an event that happened during the day. Remember to note the dates. It will be fun to look back at these pages later together.

## DRAW A PICTURE

Children use drawing to stand for writing. When children scribble and draw, they learn that the marks made on paper can mean something. These activities prepare children to understand that writing is a means of communicating a message. Encourage your child to draw or paint a picture and to tell you about the picture. Let your child choose the subject. If your child does not have any ideas that day, then suggest that he or she draw a person, favorite animal, toy or object, or recent event (for example, going to the zoo or the park). Your child may tell you spontaneously things about the picture before, during, or after he or she has drawn or painted the picture. If your child does not say anything, then ask him or her some questions ["What shall we call this?" "What's happening?" "Tell me about your picture"]. Write down exactly what your child says, and read back his or her dictation.

## GOING PLACES—THE MUSEUM

There are many types of museums that children will enjoy. Science museums have exhibits that help children understand how all sorts of things work. At natural history museums, children can learn all about animals, bugs, oceans, and volcanoes. Art museums introduce children to paintings and sculptures. Find out what is available in your area. Most museums have at least 1 day per month when entry is free of charge. Visit the museum with your child. Talk together about what you see. Read aloud the descriptive labels of the art pieces that your child has picked as his or her favorites. In some exhibitions, you can also watch movies or get information from a computer. Take home the brochures, and use them later to show other people and to tell them what you saw.

## GOING PLACES—THE ZOO

Going to the zoo is always a special treat for both children and adults. Animals are always a great topic for conversations with children. Use this opportunity to encourage language by asking questions and responding to your child's comments. Also point out animal names and other familiar words and letters on the written descriptive labels. Take photographs, and create a scrapbook with pictures of animals that you saw. Have your child dictate labels and descriptions for the photographs. Your child can also draw and write about the zoo trip after you return home.

## LET'S DANCE!

Children learn about rhythm by moving their bodies to music. Exploring rhythm helps children become sensitive to the temporal quality or the duration of sounds. Sing a song or listen to music that has different rhythms. With your child, dance to the different beats, clap hands, or use a drum. Begin with slow, regular, even beats; and later introduce uneven beats with variations in intensity and tempo. Relate movements to personal experiences ["Let's move slowly and pretend we are heavy elephants!" "Let's move fast and pretend we are flying on a plane!"]. Listen to some classical, Latin, or folk music. Talk about how the music makes you feel. What does it make you think of? Ask your child to draw a picture that goes with the music.

## MAKING SIGNS

Children learn about words and how sounds and symbols go together as they make signs to use in their play. Help your child make signs he or she can use as part of construction activities (for example, Stop, Go around, Open, Closed, Exit). As your child finds a need for new signs, help him or her create meaningful signs.

## MAPPING THE TERRITORY

Children can learn that maps represent real places by developing models and drawings of areas familiar to them. For example, landscapes can be created by playing with sand in a sandbox. Help your child to model familiar home or neighborhood features and to talk about how these features are arranged. Encourage your child to enact pretend play scenes using these landscapes as contexts ["How will the bear walk to the store?" "Shall we go down this street?"]. Talk about events that occurred in these contexts ["Remember when we went bike riding? Where did we go?"]. Encourage your child to recall events related to the outing. Use paper and crayons to draw with your child a model of the park or your child's favorite room. Talk about where objects would be located, and add details to the drawing ["Where shall we put the swings? Are they close to the trees or far away?"]. Use print to label objects (for example, stove, table) and activities (for example, cooking, eating).

## MEASURING

Science requires the use of reading and writing skills. For example, writing records of observations and taking measurements are important scientific activities. Practice literacy skills as you and your child do simple science projects. 1) Keep track of your child's height. Make your own growth chart (for example, tape a long strip of paper against a wall), or use an already-made growth chart. Mark your child's height, and then have your child measure with a measuring tape and record the numbers and observation dates. 2) Plant beans or seeds. Help your child measure the growth of the plants and record the heights and dates as well as other observations in a notebook or on a graph. 3) Have a long-jump competition. Mark the starting point of the jump with tape or another object. Use a measuring tape with easy-to-read numbers to measure the jumps. Help your child read the numbers on the tape and record the length of the jumps along with the names of the competitors. 4) Use blocks to measure different objects. Have your child stack blocks next to different objects until the tower reaches the same height as the objects. Help your child count the blocks, record numbers, or draw lines that correspond to the different heights. Compare the differences.

## MOVIE REVIEWS

After watching a television show or a movie with your child, set aside a few minutes to talk about what you watched. Ask your child to tell you about the story or topic and what he or she liked and disliked about the show. This will help your child develop communication and narrative language skills and learn how to express opinions and make judgments. Ask questions that will help your child learn about the sequence and causes of events ["When did that happen?" "What happened next?" "Why did he do that?"].

## PRINT IN THE WORLD

Learning to read and to write is a process that begins at a very early age. Children are continually exposed to many forms of print (for example, signs, labels, logos, symbols). On outings and at home with your younger child(ren), draw their attention to road signs; grocery store, gas station, and restaurant logos; signs in restaurants (for example, men's and women's bathrooms); and letters on cereal boxes. There are so many different kinds of signs in our homes and communities. It will be fun to see which ones your child likes and learns to identify. Suggest that your child might want to make some signs for the house. Give your child some cardboard to draw signs for his or her room, the kitchen, the front door, or your pet's corner.

## RECIPES

Preparing food can help a child understand the relationship between printed directions and the organized actions of one or more people, and the results are delicious. Children learn that print can be used to label and identify ingredients as well as to record and to remember steps in sequence. Let your child help you decide on a favorite recipe to cook together on a rainy day. The recipe could be as simple as a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Examine labels with your child, and ask sequencing and quantity questions as your recipe progresses ["I have the bread ready. What is our next step?" "How much jelly do you think we should use?" "What happens when there is too much jam?"]. Look for children's recipe books in bookstores or at your local library.

## SAY IT FAST

Breaking down words into syllables and sounds helps the child become aware that words not only have meaning but also are characterized by sounds. It also helps your child understand the sound-letter association involved in reading and writing. During daily activities (for example, driving in your car, walking to the grocery store), play word games with your child. Say a word by breaking it down into syllables ["Look! There's a spi-der!"]. Have your child guess the word ["Can you say that word fast?"].



## WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT?

Reading and writing help us describe and document events in the past and future and in far-away settings. This is an activity to do when reading familiar stories and during familiar routines (for example, mealtime, bedtime, bathtime). Invite your child to tell you what will happen next in the story or what will happen next on your drive to the grocery store. Predicting events helps your child go beyond the immediate here-and-now. It will help your child when he or she begins to read.

## WRITING MESSAGES

In school, your child is learning that print is a tool for communication. Your child is learning how spoken words can be captured on paper and preserved for others to read. Each day, your child's teacher will write a message with the children, telling about important events that take place in the classroom. At the end of the day, the teacher might ask the children to tell about a significant event that happened to them and record it to be reread the following day. You can encourage your child to use written messages at home. Ask your child to dictate a short message to give to an older sibling or other adults in the home, send to friends or teachers at school, or mail to relatives. Encourage your child to write or copy a few words and draw or paste pictures to communicate a message. You can also leave written messages for your child. For example, you can write a short note or draw a picture of an upcoming event or a weekend outing (for example, the zoo, the grocery store, a mountain hike). Writing and reading messages are fun ways to stimulate literacy.