

# Summary of the literature – information for parents and carers

This is a summary of the extensive literature review undertaken by Professor Marilyn Fleer - Monash University, Faculty of Education, Peninsula and Professor Bridie Raban - The University of Melbourne, Learning and Educational Development, Faculty of Education, Parkville.<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

One thing you will notice about your child is that they are learning every day. They are learning from their experiences of their surroundings and their contacts with the people around them who care for them. Parents, other family members and carers are important. They show babies, toddlers and young children what is expected and reward efforts with cuddles, smiles, 'coohs' and 'aahs', tickles and fun. Routines like feeding, nappy changing, dressing and undressing, getting up in the morning and going to bed are all times together when you can talk about what is happening, sing and play games along with physical contact. Examples include counting buttons as they are done up or undone, showing surprise as head, arms and legs emerge through clothing, and laughing with your child as they engage in the activities and you interact together.

Below we have listed typical activities from the research literature that will support your child's growth into the literacies and numeracies of their families and communities. Learning is best achieved through activities that are predictable, full of meaning (rich) and are repeated often; learning is hard when experiences are constantly unexpected. Although we have separated activities in the early years as being suitable for babies, toddlers or preschool children, learning is made up of a cumulative set of experiences. Many of the things you do with babies you will still be doing with older children, for instance talking about what is happening and sharing stories together. We also know that in some communities, the capacity of the child, rather than their age, is what really matters. For some families, talk is very important for communicating; for other families, using body language is important. Both are important for supporting learning.

## Babies: 0–12 months

Books will need to be durable and manageable for the hands of babies, for instance books made of board or cloth. Books that are shared together need to be interactive so that both the reader and the child become involved, and they also need to be particularly interesting to feel and touch. Pop-up books are responsive to page turning, and books with rhythm and rhyme begin to give the basis for memorable events.

Give and receive books as presents so your baby understands that a book is a significant object sees. Store their books in a particular place so they can see their own library grow.

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<sup>1</sup> Marilyn Fleer is Professor of Early Childhood Education at Monash University. Bridie Raban holds the Mooroolbeek Foundation Chair of Early Childhood Studies at the University of Melbourne.

Set aside a special time of the day and place (turn off the TV) to read books with your baby. Help them turn the pages of the book, talk about the pictures and change your voice as you read different characters. Books will need to have predictable text, for instance 'I jump, I run, I fall, I can count' for the same reason, so that books can be associated with familiarity. Go through catalogues together, point to familiar objects and name them, and discuss whether or not you have one in the home. Have magnetic letters and numbers on the fridge door at baby's height for playing with and making patterns.

Sing songs and lullabies to your baby, chant rhymes, clap out rhythms and bounce the baby (carefully) on your knee and dance to music while holding your baby to gain a sense of rhythm. Hold your baby, smile and laugh with your baby, tickle and have fun when you are close. Tell stories and make up stories about things that are happening. Listen for sounds around you and think what they might be and repeat sounds your baby makes. Notice the facial expressions of your baby, and those around you and copy these. Talk about objects you can both see, for instance a bird outside or the cat coming in, point to familiar objects, name them and talk about what you do with them and in these ways extend and expand their understandings of the immediate environment. Help them notice the spaces around them. Look at patterns such as that on a T-shirt, pair of socks, on a tree or the traffic moving along your street. Accompany actions with talk, count familiar objects such as toes, fingers, eyes, nose, ears and hands and name pieces of clothing as you dress your baby. The most important thing to remember is to talk to your baby about everything or to look closely at things and notice the patterns. Expect visitors to engage with your baby and do not think that because your baby cannot yet talk, they do not understand you when you talk to them.

### **Toddlers: 1–3 years**

Continue to have a special time each day to share books with your toddler. Read favourite stories repeatedly and tape record them for playing in the car. Let them hold the book and follow the reading as you point to the words and discuss the pictures. Encourage them to join in your favourite parts. Introduce books by saying, 'This is a story about ...', 'This is a book about ...'. Explain the meaning of new words and relate them to what the child already knows, also relate stories to events in real life. Ask them to fill in parts of the story as they become familiar with it, ask them what happens next before you turn a page. Find words that begin with the same letter as your child's name, the name of the cat or dog. Help your child choose books at the local library. Read and point out signs and labels in the shops and along the roadside. Play games in the car such as looking for special numbers and letters in registration plates, counting all the red things they see and thinking of something beginning with the same letter as their name. Buy alphabet and counting books for browsing and reference. Help your child notice how we measure things such as weighing the vegetables, or tallying up the sheep before they are loaded onto a truck or finding shoes of the right size.

Evening bedtime is a special time when books and stories can be shared. Clothes can be chosen for the morning and toys put back in place. The routines and events of the day can be recalled and the next day planned; it is a time for affection, reflection and imaginings between the end of the day and the onset of sleep.

### **Preschool children: 3–5 years**

Increasingly, children during these preschool years will begin to make up their own stories and may even want you to write them down for them. Ideas around authorship and where this is found in a book, along with other aspects of the title page can be discussed. Again, read with your child every day. When you watch TV, talk about the program and relate what happens to other experiences. Prepare a 'writing table' in the kitchen or somewhere central with paper, pencils, pens and other appropriate equipment and paraphernalia. Write shopping lists together, write emails together to other family members, write birthday cards, write down measurements when buying or trying on clothes or when decorating the child's bedroom and write tallies when playing cards. Take family photographs together and talk about what was happening, write down what they say and place these prominently for a while so your child can refer to them. Talk about things you see and count things that are the same, find a rhyming word or a word that starts with the same sound. Make clear connections between experiences, for instance 'That dog is bigger than ours', or 'Their car is the same colour as ours'. Point out words in shops and on the roadside explaining what they mean. Ask questions about what might happen, find out what they would do in similar circumstances. Importantly, engage your child with the world in which you live and share, as well as extending their thinking. Notice or plan different times of the day such as lunch time, snack time and bedtime. Look at different types of tools for measuring such as a thermometer, or the clock (and timer) on the stove, bathroom or kitchen scales, tape measure in a sewing kit, or measuring cups and talk about or show them how you use them.