

## Language and Literacy – The Younger Child

Reading, writing and spelling are language-based skills that draw on a foundation of oral language abilities. A strong oral language base includes:

Awareness, understanding and use of the

- **phonological system** of the language (letters represent sounds, words are made of sounds in a certain order).
- **syntactic system** of the language (the rules for how we make sentences such as word order and grammar).
- **semantic system** of the language (word meanings and how words go together because of similar meanings).
- **pragmatic** system of the language (the rules for how we talk with others such as politeness and turn-taking)

What you can do to help the younger child:

- Read to your child often and talk to your child about the books you are reading. Give him choices. It's okay to read books your child likes over and over!
- Act out the stories you are reading together. Introduce story vocabulary e.g. What *character* do you want to be? What should happen *first*, in the *middle*, at the *end*? Point out facial expressions (in the pictures or ones you use) and use your tone of voice to help him understand feelings and the perspectives of others. Take turns playing different roles.
- Explain the meanings of new words you encounter when you read. Try to use those words in real life situations later on.
- Play games like “Guess What I have?” Provide clues to your child and have him guess what you have. Then, reverse roles and have the child give you clues about an object he has hidden. This activity is great for helping your child learn new words to describe things. It helps him learn to create pictures in his mind and builds understanding of what others need to know to make a good guess.

- Play with sounds. A great website for building phonological awareness skills is Reading Rocket. Check out their top ten resources at <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/top-10-resources-phonological-and-phonemic-awareness>
- One of the top ten resources recommended by Reading Rocket is [http://pbskids.org/wordworld/characters/game\\_frm.html](http://pbskids.org/wordworld/characters/game_frm.html) A set of animal characters are used to teach simple spelling, word recognition, initial consonant sounds and simple rhyming.
- Point out every day print e.g. “It’s time to leave... can you find the EXIT sign?”
- Play word games... see our handout: **Everyday Word Games to Build Language.**
- Model longer and more complete sentences when your child tells you something e.g. Your child says “Doggy chasing kitty!” You respond, “Yes, the dog that was behind the bushes chased the kitty away from his yard.”
- Use “story books” *and* “information” books to help your child learn about different styles of writing. This is a good way to help teach your child about “real” and “pretend”. Tell oral stories as well (e.g. favorite fairy tales) and let your child chime in. See our handout titled **Narratives: Can Your Child Tell Stories?**
- Look for educational apps that build literacy skills. We like to go to sources like Reading Rockets who update their websites regularly with apps they have reviewed. Check out <http://www.readingrockets.org/teaching/reading101/literacyapps>

## References

A Handbook of Language and Literacy Development: A Roadmap from 0 – 60 Months,  
Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network,  
<http://www.theroadmap.ualberta.ca/home>



Paul, Rhea Language Disorders from Infancy through Adolescence – 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Moseby  
Elsevier Pub., 2007



