

Supporting Literacy Development at Home



'It is widely recognised that if pupils are to maximise their potential from schooling they will need the full support of their parents.'

(Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003 p. 7)

The most important thing that you as a parent can do is to build your child's confidence in speaking, reading and writing, and to promote positive attitudes and habits for life.

You are the person best placed to be a positive role model. Let your child see you reading and writing every day. Your child should realise the enjoyment that reading and writing give you, and how they are useful and necessary tools to be used on a daily basis.

It is a good idea to establish a strong predictable routine. Find a quiet comfortable spot to enjoy a book together. This can be a special time to build relationships and literacy skills simultaneously. It is a great way to spend some quality time with your child.

Key to this is selecting the right book for your child.

Literacy is the key to the rest of the curriculum.

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The right book to read with your child will have

- high-quality illustrations
- a strong plot with interesting characters
- rich vocabulary.

Books should match your child's interests.

It is important to introduce children to a wide variety of reading material so that they may discover a personal preference.

Talk to your child about what they are interested in.

Is your child attracted more to fiction or fact books?

For fiction, think about funny books, scary books, historical fiction, fantasy, science-fiction, adventure, mystery, graphic novels and picture books

For non-fiction books, think about biographies, autobiographies, books about places, animals, the environment, how-to books (draw, paint, cook...)

What matters is that they are enjoying what they are reading.

Sourcing books for reading with your child

This should be a book that is more challenging than your child can read alone. This is a great opportunity to introduce children to more complex language, characters, and storylines which will build their vocabulary and ideas for their own writing.

Join the local library and ask the librarian for suggestions.

Look out for award-winning books, which usually have a sticker on the front.

Some Irish awards include:

- Literacy Association of Ireland Biennial Award
- Bisto Awards/Bord Gáis Energy Irish book award

International awards given for outstanding illustrations and writing include:

- Kate Greenaway Medal
- Charlotte Huck
- Caldecott Medal
- Hans Christian Anderson
- Young Reader's Choice

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Helping children choose a 'just right' book to read independently

The 5 Finger Rule

A 'just-right' book is one in which your child can read almost all words in the text easily and one which is also interesting to them.


Use the five finger rule:

If there are more than five words on a given page that your child struggles within the book, it may be too difficult at this point in time.

It would be best to choose an easier one. It is about finding the right book for the right child.

5 Finger Rule:
 Open a book to any page and start reading.
 Hold up a finger for each unknown word:

- 0-1 = too easy
- 2-3 = just right
- 4 = OK to try
- 5 = too hard



Sharing a book with your child.

Talking to your child about the book as you read is as important as the act of reading itself.

On the **first** reading of a book, follow these handy steps:

Before Reading

The aim is get the child thinking about what they will read.

Discuss the cover: Front, and blurb on the back. Share your own ideas and thoughts and make predictions using clues from the cover: the title, illustrations, etc.

Make connections between the text and real life, other books read, e.g., I'm thinking this book will be about... I think-----will happen because... This reminds me of...

During Reading

Read the text aloud with your child.

Take time to pause and discuss the pictures, the characters, the unfolding story line; make predictions... ask questions, wonder aloud.

BUT, don't slow the story down too much.

Read with expression: use different voices for the various characters... loudly, softly children are experiencing fluent reading).

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After Reading

This is the ideal time to have a chat about the story.

Ask your child if they enjoyed the story, if it reminded them of any other books or events in their lives.

Think about the characters...their feelings, why they might have acted the way they did...and any changes they would make to the story.

See if your child can retell the main events or important parts of the story in sequence.

Conversation starters

- I remember when...
- This reminds me of...
 - I wonder if...
- My favourite part was when...
 - I wish that ...



Vocabulary

On a **second** or subsequent reading, notice the rich vocabulary and the way the author uses words to evoke emotion.

This is also a great time to reinforce common words that your child may be learning to read, write and spell in school, e.g., the, said, he, she, friend, because (dolch/fry words).

The best way to develop automaticity in sight vocabulary is through games that build familiarity, e.g., word snap, word/letter sound bingo, x's and o's.

Sight words should not be sounded out as they usually follow irregular phonetic patterns, e.g., *said* cannot be sounded out letter by letter.



Did you know that when your child can read the first 100 sight words, they can read half of any text put in front of them! It's important your child can read, write and spell these words effortlessly.

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Writing

At home, writing should be meaningful, i.e., have a specific purpose such as writing birthday cards, shopping lists, phone messages.

Helping children notice words and word patterns supports their writing.

Approximate spelling is acceptable, e.g., 'bcoz' for 'because', and shows that your child is using letters and sounds they have learned.

Playing games like *I spy* helps children to link words and spelling.

All attempts should be praised.

Provide opportunities for your child to experiment with writing, such as a writing box.

Drawing is often the first entry point into writing. Encourage your child to draw and tell you about the drawing.

Encourage your child to tell you about their writing and to read it to you.

At home, writing should not be an extension of school work, but should be fun and informal.

A writing box could include:

- Paper that is different colours, shapes and sizes
- Lined and un-lined paper
- Pens, pencils and markers
- Eraser, sharpener and ruler
- A folder to store their writing



Finally

Supporting literacy development at home is about building good attitudes and habits for life. It's an opportunity to discover ideas, opinions and preferences together.

It's a chance to spend quality time with your child, have fun, and develop their literacy skills.

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References

Desforges, C and Abouchar, A, (2003). *The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievement and Adjustment: A Literature Review, Research Report RR433, UK Dept. for Education and Skills.*

Hannon, P. (2003). *Family Literacy Programmes* (p. 99-111) In Hall, N., Larson, J. and Marsh, J. (Eds.), *Handbook of early childhood literacy.* London: Sage.

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Developing Vocabulary Within a Balanced Literacy Framework

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Children develop concepts, dispositions and skills in relation to:

- Oral Language: Outcomes 5 & 6: Acquisition and use of vocabulary
- Reading Outcome 6: Reading vocabulary
- Writing: Outcome 5: Vocabulary

The Importance of Vocabulary

Vocabulary knowledge is one of the skills critical to literacy development (the others are phonological awareness, phonics, fluency comprehension, and writing). It is best nurtured within a developmentally appropriate research-based **balanced literacy framework**. Interaction within meaningful contexts, such as pretend play, read aloud, guided reading, shared writing and writing workshop, supports children in acquiring a rich vocabulary. The breadth and depth of a young child's vocabulary is a strong predictor of their reading

comprehension at both primary and secondary level. Variation in children's vocabulary knowledge is common, and vocabulary gaps can be bridged by intensive and focused intervention from a very early stage (i.e., age 3 or 4 onwards). Such an early focus can not only improve oral vocabulary, but can also impact positively on later reading comprehension. This link is an important one, as children can more easily and swiftly segment, read and understand words that are already in their oral vocabularies.

No one instructional method is sufficient for optimal vocabulary learning. Opportunities for both incidental word learning and explicit intentional teaching are necessary. The activities described here can be completed orally only (rendering them suitable for all age levels), or in combination with reading, writing, drama or art activities.



Parents are critical collaborators in the vocabulary learning process and are central to efforts to promote, enhance and maximise vocabulary learning at home through interaction in play, in sharing books, in informal conversations (e.g., at mealtimes) and through engaging in some of the activities outlined below.