Your Child and Language and Literacy Development

The Ministry of Education's *Early Learning Program Guide* emphasises the importance of play and exploration in the development of language and literacy in the young child. Language and literacy are important elements in the development of thinking skills which, in turn, lead to success in school.

Helping your child develop language and literacy

Your child is born ready to communicate by recognising your voice, making eye contact and responding to your attention. Every time you smile, cuddle, play and respond to your child's needs you are communicating and building the essential relationship of trust that is the first step in language and literacy development.

Your relationship with your child is critical for successful development and literally builds your child's brain. When you respond, talk, listen and play with your child it enhances your child's ability to listen, think and communicate with others.

Language and literacy development involves:

- listening
- understanding
- responding
- playing
- taking turns
- expressing thoughts and ideas in a variety of ways
- enjoyment of books
- awareness of print in the environment

In addition to a relationship with you, your child is born with a powerful tool to support development and learning; this tool is your child's curiosity. Through curiosity and play, your child learns how the world works and expresses ideas with words and creative expression.

What will you see in your child's learning program?

- interesting materials for your child to play with and explore

- educators having conversations with children about topics of interest to the children and offering children choices and support

- lots of printed words in the room such as children's names on lockers and labels on shelves

- books throughout the room e.g. recipe books with illustrations in the housekeeping centre, books about building in the block centre

- materials for writing, drawing, modeling and painting that encourage your child to express ideas in many ways

- children making cards or writing lists and letters using pictures, scribbles and letter-like shapes and explaining what their writing means

- educators stimulating conversations by adding new materials to the environment and introducing new vocabulary

- children talking with each other and with adults

- children and educators playing with sounds e.g. singing, chanting and enjoying books with rhythm and rhyme

Conversations with Your Child

Research has shown that children from talkative families may have heard 30 million more words by age three than children from less-talkative families! Those same children from talkative families also did better on reading readiness tests in the third grade. Why? One reason is that learning to read depends on having a big vocabulary. Lots of talking and conversations with adults, especially when combined with listening to family stories and hearing adults reading books aloud, is a great way to build vocabulary.

Try these ideas for talking with your child:
- observe your child to find out what interests them
- listen carefully to understand what your child is thinking and let your child take the lead in topics of conversation
- relax and allow your child to express ideas and thoughts
- clarify that you understand what your child is saying by asking: "Did you mean ...?"
- provide activities that support your child's interests and encourage your child to share ideas with you
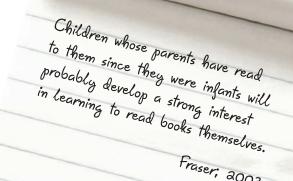
Reading Together

Books are a wonderful way for your child to develop language and literacy skills. Books spark the imagination, give pleasure and provide an opportunity for children to see similarities with their own experiences. Books are treasures that open doors to new experiences and a wider understanding of the world around us. Reading with your child increases vocabulary, strengthens your relationship and shows your child that reading is a special experience.

What will you see in your child's learning program?

- good-quality books on a wide variety of topics, both real life and imaginative
- educators looking at books with children and asking questions such as "I wonder what will happen next?"
- children treating books with respect by turning the pages carefully and putting them where they belong
- children interpreting what might be happening in the story by looking at the pictures
- children being shown that letters and words have meaning and represent ideas

Children whose parents have read to them since they were infants will probably develop a strong interest in learning to read books themselves.

Fraser, 2003

What can you do at home?

- enrich your child's vocabulary by naming objects and feelings and by introducing new words in day-to-day experiences
- use the ordinary moments of the day (mealtime, bedtime) to have conversations about the day and the interests of your child
- help your child use language to express thoughts and feelings: "Tell Ella you are angry when she takes your toy truck."
- use "I wonder" questions to encourage your child to think in different ways and consider other options
- read regularly with your child using a variety of books
- tell stories and make up stories with your child
- have fun with words, poems and rhymes
- model literacy by writing shopping lists, reading and sending emails, letters and cards
- encourage your child to find letters in magazines and newspapers or find family birthdays on the calendar

More Ideas

Visit your local library regularly with your child. Borrow books and participate in special children's activities.

Point out words when you are out driving or walking such as words on stop signs, street signs and posters in store windows.

en.childrenslibrary.org/index.shtml links to the International Children's Digital Library where you will have free access to children's electronic books in eleven languages – including English – and from 42 countries.

www.growwithstories.org/staff.php includes tips for reading together with your children, book lists for babies, toddlers and preschoolers, crafts, and other useful websites about language and literacy.

Government of Saskatchewan
Ministry of Education

For more information on the *Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide*, go to

www.education.gov.sk.ca/ELCC