

EVIDENCE SUPPORTING EARLY LITERACY AND EARLY LEARNING

BOOKS BUILD
CONNECTIONS
TOOLKIT



Dig deeper and explore the evidence demonstrating that early shared-reading experiences build language, literacy, and social-emotional skills and strengthen the bond between parent and child during the critical early childhood years. You can also examine the evidence base supporting practice-based literacy promotion in the medical home. Below are abstracts from two American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) documents. The first abstract is the AAP policy statement “Literacy Promotion: An Essential Component of Primary Care Pediatric Practice.” The second abstract is from “School Readiness,” an AAP technical report that links early literacy with readiness for school. Pediatric professionals can also promote the “5 Rs” of early education, a simple and useful framework for families to support their children’s early literacy and early learning.

“Books are part of our lives. We read at bedtime, in waiting rooms, and whenever we just want sometime to cuddle together. Having a doctor give a book to my children shows them just how important reading is.”—Brenda Wells, mother of a 3-year-old and a newborn

Why Early Literacy Promotion Is So Important

Research shows that reading, talking, and singing regularly with young children from birth stimulates brain development. This stimulation in turn builds language, literacy, and children’s motivation to learn. A young child’s early language experience predicts her early academic skill; however, national data reveal that many parents have not heard about or acted on this important message.

- More than 1 in 3 American children start kindergarten without the language skills they need to learn to read.
- Each year, approximately 2/3 of children in the United States and 80% of those living below the poverty threshold fail to develop reading proficiency by the end of third grade.
- About 60% of American children from birth to age 5 who live in high-income families are read to daily; almost 2/3 of them hear stories or sing with their parents every day.
- By comparison, 1/3 of children from low-income families are read to daily and fewer than half of them hear stories or sing with their parents every day.
- Parents are more likely to sing with or tell stories to their children than they are to read together. In families dealing with economic hardship, children are less likely to engage in any of these activities as compared with children in more economically advantaged families.
- When pediatricians provide guidance about the importance of reading and talking with young children and provide children’s books, the necessary tools to young families, parents listen. They read more with their young child and their child’s early language and early literacy skills grow.

Citation: National Survey of Children’s Health 2011–2012, <http://childhealthdata.org/learn/NSCH>; and AAP Policy Statement, “Literacy Promotion: An Essential Component of Primary Care Pediatric Practice” (see next page).

Abstract of AAP Policy Statement “Literacy Promotion: An Essential Component of Primary Care Pediatric Practice”

Reading regularly with young children stimulates optimal patterns of brain development and strengthens parent–child relationships at a critical time in child development, which, in turn, builds language, literacy, and social–emotional skills that last a lifetime.

Pediatric providers have a unique opportunity to encourage parents to engage in this important and enjoyable activity with their children beginning in infancy. Research has revealed that parents listen and children learn as a result of literacy promotion by pediatricians, which provides a practical and evidence-based opportunity to support early brain development in primary care practice.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that pediatric providers promote early literacy development for children beginning in infancy and continuing at least until the age of kindergarten entry by doing the following:

1. Advising all parents that reading aloud with young children can enhance parent–child relationships and prepare young minds to learn language and early literacy skills
2. Counseling all parents about developmentally appropriate shared-reading activities that are enjoyable for children and their parents and offer language-rich exposure to books, pictures, and the written word
3. Providing developmentally appropriate books given at health supervision visits for all high-risk, low-income young children
4. Using a robust spectrum of options to support and promote these efforts
5. Partnering with other child advocates to influence national messaging and policies that support and promote these key early shared-reading experiences

The AAP supports federal and state funding for children’s books to be provided at pediatric health supervision visits to children at high risk living at or near the poverty threshold and the

integration of literacy promotion, an essential component of pediatric primary care, into pediatric resident education.

This policy statement is supported by the AAP technical report “School Readiness” (see the abstract below) and supports the AAP policy statement “Early Childhood Adversity, Toxic Stress, and the Role of the Pediatrician: Translating Developmental Science Into Lifelong Health.”

The full policy statement includes data related to the need for early literacy promotion, the connection between early reading and early brain and child development, and the relation of early literacy to health and school readiness.

Full citation: Council on Early Childhood. Literacy Promotion: An Essential Component of Primary Care Pediatric Practice. *Pediatrics*. August 1, 2014;134(2): 404-409. doi: 10.1542/peds.2014-1384

Abstract of AAP Technical Report “School Readiness”

School readiness includes the readiness of the individual child, the school’s readiness for children, and the ability of the family and community to support optimal early child development.

It is the responsibility of schools to be ready for all children at all levels of readiness. Children’s readiness for kindergarten should become an outcome measure for community-based programs, rather than an exclusion criterion at the beginning of the formal educational experience.

Our new knowledge of early brain and child development has revealed that modifiable factors in a child’s early experience can greatly affect that child’s learning trajectory.

Many US children enter kindergarten with limitations in their social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development that might have been significantly diminished or eliminated through early identification of and attention to child and family needs.

Pediatricians have a role in promoting school readiness for all children, beginning at birth, through their practices and advocacy. The American Academy of Pediatrics affords pediatricians many opportunities to promote the physical, social–emotional, and educational health of young children, with other advocacy groups.

PEDIATRIC PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE: EVIDENCE SUPPORTING EARLY LITERACY AND EARLY LEARNING

This technical report supports American Academy of Pediatrics policy statements “Quality Early Education and Child Care From Birth to Kindergarten” and “The Inappropriate Use of School ‘Readiness’ Tests.”

Full citation: High PC; for the Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption, and Dependent Care and the Council on School Health. School readiness technical report. *Pediatrics*. April 1, 2008; 121(4):e1008-e1015.
doi:10.1542/peds.2008-0079

Reaffirmation for this policy was published in *Pediatrics*. December 1, 2013; 132(6):e1715.

The 5 Rs for Early Education

As recommended in both the policy statement and the technical report summarized above, pediatricians are encouraged to promote the **5 Rs** of early education with young families:

1. **Reading** together as a daily, fun, family activity
2. **Rhyming**, playing, talking, singing, and cuddling together often throughout the day
3. Building **Routines** for meals, play, and sleep, which help children know what to expect and what is expected of them
4. Giving **Rewards** for everyday successes (especially for effort toward goals like helping), understanding that praise from those closest to a child is a very potent reward
5. Developing **Relationships** that are nurturing, reciprocal, purposeful, and lasting, which are the foundations of healthy early brain and child development

By making these statements, pediatricians are getting the word out that reading aloud, talking, and singing with young children, beginning at birth, are both fun and rewarding. The benefits are so clear and so important that promoting reading at young children’s check-ups has become an essential part of pediatric care. Starting a daily routine of reading with young children, perhaps to settle down at bedtime, is a powerful way to build healthful habits that last a lifetime. The return on this investment is huge!

Other pediatric professional ePubs in this AAP series include the following:

- Finding the Right Book for Every Child
- Selecting Books for Your Program
- What Every Pediatric Professional Can Do to Promote Early Literacy and Early Learning

Family resources related to early literacy and early learning include the following:

- Helping Your Child Learn to Read
- Sharing Books With Your Baby up to Age 11 Months
- Sharing Books With Your 1-Year-Old
- Sharing Books With Your 2-Year-Old
- Sharing Books With Your Preschooler
- Sharing Books With Your School-Age Child
- The Secret to a Smarter Baby
- Why It Is Never Too Early to Start Reading With Your Baby

Please visit aap.org/literacy for further information about resources mentioned within this publication and additional resources on early literacy.

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