

# WHAT EVERY PEDIATRIC PROFESSIONAL CAN DO TO PROMOTE EARLY LITERACY AND EARLY LEARNING

BOOKS BUILD CONNECTIONS TOOLKIT



Here's a list of things pediatric professionals in the medical home can do to promote early literacy in their practices and communities.

"One of the reasons my kids love coming to their doctor's appointments is because they love receiving great books!"—Dennisse Reyes, mother of 2

1. **Familiarize yourself with the evidence on the importance of reading, singing, talking, and playing with young children and how practice-based literacy promotion creates and reinforces optimal synapses in children's developing brains.** These connections build language, literacy, and social-emotional skills at a critical time in a child's development and secure the bond between parent and child.
2. **Implement a literacy promotion program in your practice. Share anticipatory guidance regarding early literacy and early learning to foster a love of books at each visit beginning at birth.** A wealth of helpful information on establishing and supporting practice-based literacy promotion is available in this toolkit and from Reach Out and Read (ROR).
3. **Encourage parents and other caregivers to read, talk, sing, and play with their young children beginning at birth.** Ask about family beliefs and practices regarding early learning and literacy. Specific guidance for parents about reading and sharing books with their children is available in the family resources publications listed below.
4. Promote the **5 Rs** of early education with young families:
  - **Reading** together as a daily, fun, family activity
  - **Rhyming**, playing, talking, singing, and cuddling together often throughout the day
  - Building **Routines** for meals, play, and sleep, which help children know what to expect and what is expected of them
  - 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
  - Developing **Relationships** that are nurturing, reciprocal, purposeful, and lasting, which are the foundations of healthy early brain and child development.
5. **Welcome children by entering the exam room with a book in your hand. Role model sharing books during the visit and use that book as a component of your developmental surveillance.** The Literacy Milestone chart developed by ROR can be your road map to helping families share books, and ROR's videos for pediatric providers demonstrate inclusion of books and literacy promotion in practice.
6. **Encourage parents of preschoolers to find high-quality early educational opportunities for their children such as preschool or Head Start.** The National Association for the Education of Young Children has lists of preschools with voluntary accreditation. Head Start provides high quality preschool programs for 3 and 4 year olds in economically disadvantaged

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families. Child Care Aware helps families learn more about the elements of high-quality child care and how to find programs in their communities.

7. **Encourage parents of 4-year-olds to go to the Get Ready to Read Web site to learn about family activities and resources supporting early literacy.** Developed by the National Center for Learning Disabilities, this Web site provides many literacy skill-building activities, including a preschool reading readiness test for parents to use with their 4-year-olds.
8. **Encourage parents of kindergarteners and elementary school-age children to go to Reading Rockets and other Web sites for ideas about how to support early readers.** Colorín Colorado, a sister project of Reading Rockets, is a bilingual site that offers a range of resources for Spanish-speaking and English-language-learning parents, including family literacy activities. The Reading Is Fundamental Web site is a rich source of information about reading with young children, including ways of combating summer learning loss in young school-age children.
9. **Encourage parents and other caregivers to visit their local library with their children to borrow books and participate in story time.** Provide a list of the locations and hours of local libraries to help them make these connections.
10. **Provide culturally and developmentally appropriate books and magazines in your waiting room.** Families benefit from being in a literacy-rich waiting area or exam room. The American Academy of Pediatrics publication on selecting books for your program offers guidelines based on children's ages and other considerations (see the list of other pediatric professional ePubs below). Lists of multicultural children's books can be found on the Reading Is Fundamental and on the American Library Association's Notable Books for Children Web sites.
11. **Display posters or show DVDs of parents and other caregivers and children reading together.** The American Library Association store and the National Literacy Trust have great materials for this purpose.
12. **Connect families with the greatest need to evidence-based home visiting programs in your community.** Home visiting programs can foster early learning and support parents as their child's first and most important teacher. The Health Resources and Services Administration's Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Web site provides information about these programs and links to grantees in your state.
13. **Hold a book drive with community partners to provide books to children and families in your practice.** The event can provide an ideal opportunity for schools or faith-based organizations seeking worthwhile service projects to partner with you.
14. **Collaborate with local child care providers and child advocates to promote the importance of reading, talking, and singing with young children.** Work with these groups to develop and support literacy-rich environments and experiences for young children. For more information, refer to the National Association for the Education of Young Children Web site and to AAP's Early Brain and Child Development Web page, which has PowerPoint slides that can get you started. One possible source of support for this work is an AAP Community Access to Child Health (CATCH) grant. Ideas about literacy promoting CATCH grants can be found at <http://www2.aap.org/catch/funding.htm>.
15. **Solicit volunteers to read aloud in the waiting area to model how parents and caregivers can read with their children.** Volunteers can truly enhance the experience children have visiting their pediatricians. Volunteers can read aloud, decorate bulletin boards with literacy-rich material, or assist children with educational activities in the waiting area. Reading Is Fundamental has

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a wealth of support and information about reading and children. Its Web site provides information for volunteers, teachers, and parents on current trends in education, down-to-earth suggestions on reading in the home, and no-nonsense strategies to improve children's reading. The Corporation for National and Community Service can post your program to recruit volunteers for your practice.

16. **Encourage parents and caregivers with low literacy levels to share picture books with their children, talk with them about what is happening in the pictures, and possibly even act out the stories with them.** Telling and retelling favorite stories and singing songs together are also fun family activities that build early learning skills. Refer interested parents and caregivers to adult literacy programs. Helping parents improve their reading will certainly benefit their children. America's Literacy Directory Web site has a list of literacy and educational resources that allows users to type in a city, state, or ZIP code to find a program near them.
17. **Read with the children in your life.** Read with your children, your grandchildren, your nieces and nephews, your friends' children, and the children in your practice. Read with children whenever you can. **Read because you love reading, adore children, and want to share this joy with them.**

Adapted from the AAP Literacy Promotion Technical Assistance Toolkit (1999) and the AAP Literacy Promotion Toolkit Web site (2008), Diane DerMarderosian, MD, FAAP, Pamela C High, MD, FAAP, Jackie Miller, and the AAP Council on Early Childhood, 2014

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

- Evidence Supporting Early Literacy and Early Learning
- Finding the Right Book for Every Child
- Selecting Books for Your Program

### **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](http://aap.org/literacy) for further information about resources mentioned within this publication and additional resources on early literacy.

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