

Speak Up! 10 tips to increase your child's early literacy skills

For some children, early literacy skills come easily and naturally through interactions with peers and adults. For most children, however, these skills need to be explicitly taught. Below are techniques parents can use to encourage and enhance these skills at home.

1. Play listening games. Listen [together] for environmental sounds (fire truck, birds chirping, etc.) and see if your child can identify the sound.
2. Have fun with rhyming games. Read or recite a nursery rhyme that the child is familiar with. Leave out a word and ask the child to supply it (e.g. "Twinkle, twinkle, little star. How I wonder what you ____.")
3. Sing songs that have rhyming words (e.g. "Down by the Bay") and encourage them to make up their own lines to keep the song going. Sing familiar songs (e.g. "Old MacDonald Had a Farm") as well as made-up songs.
4. Stick to routines. Try making up songs to teach routines such as brushing teeth.
5. Read books with predictable text such as *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* by Eric Carle or *I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly*. Once the child is familiar with the book, see if he/she can "read" it back to you.
6. Initiate sound awareness. While driving in the car, ask the child to spot as many things as he can that begin with a certain sound. For example, ask the child to tell you every time he sees something that begins with the /b/ sound (e.g. bus, baby, bike, barn, ball, boy, etc.)
7. Clap out syllables. While shopping at the store, ask your child to clap out the number of syllables he hears in certain words. This is a great way to work on vocabulary and categorization as well. For example you could say "Find a fruit that begins with the /w/ sound." If he says "watermelon," see if he can clap out the syllables "wa-ter-mel-on."
8. Play word games and sing songs that require you to manipulate sounds to create new words (e.g. The Name Game).
9. Talk about what your child is doing. Defining unfamiliar words and engaging them in meaningful conversations about past and present experiences are all ways to enhance a child's oral vocabulary skills.
10. Use complex words when talking to your child. Expose your child to higher level vocabulary words whenever possible. Replace familiar words with more complex synonyms when you can (e.g. "I am exhausted," or "The stain came out of your shirt. It has vanished.")
11. The key to later reading success is ensuring that children build a strong foundation of phonological awareness skills and a varied and complex oral vocabulary. As parents, you can help to reinforce these skills through activities you do every day.
12. Literacy involves much more than the ability to read words printed on a page. According to the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 and the National Literacy Act of 1991, literacy has been defined as "an individual's ability to read, write, speak, compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family, and in society."

According to the National Reading Panel's (NRP) report in 2000, a solid early literacy curriculum needs to contain explicit instruction of the following five skills to successfully teach children to read: phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary and text comprehension.

For additional resources on speech and language development, visit [American Speech-Language-Hearing Association \(ASHA\)](#).

For additional resources on literacy and reading instruction, visit [National Reading Panel \(NRP\)](#).