

## Literacy

Family Literacy is adults and children learning together. Providing learning activities at home helps children to acquire the reading comprehension, writing and math skills that prepare them for school success and later productive, fulfilling lives. Learning is a lifelong activity that neither begins nor ends with the formal school years. Desjardins (2004) identifies the final outcomes of literacy and learning as follows:

- Psychological well-being: self-respect, happiness, identity, decision-making;
- Economic well-being: financial support, productivity, wealth;
- Physical well-being: health, nutrition, safety; □
- Social well-being: relations, friendships, empathy, civic involvement, democratic empowerment.

42 % of Canadians aged 16 to 65 do not have the literacy skills required to live and work in today's society (Statistics Canada and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2005). And 38% of 16-25 year olds have only achieved Level 1 or Level 2 literacy – levels that are not considered adequate to qualify for a good job (HRSDC and Statistics Canada, 2005). Many of these people are able to read and write, but are unable to complete a job application, or understand directions on a prescription drug label.

The State of Learning in Canada-“No time for Complacency” report from the Canadian Council on Learning, highlights several concerns:

- Canada's overall rate of literacy did not improve between 1994 and 2003
- Canada lags behind other countries in providing workplace training
- Many Canadians are unable to understand the information necessary to deal with their own health,
- Nearly nine out of 10 older Canadians lack the health literacy skills they need, and
- One in four children enters kindergarten with a learning or behavioural problem.

Parents can play an important role in addressing this last point, since the first steps in the development of literacy begin in the early years. The foundation for future learning takes place in the very early years through the experiences that infants and young children have. The development of learning begins during infancy when a baby knows his or her mother's voice, recognizes her face, and responds with smiles.

Infants and toddlers listen to words and sentences and begin to repeat the sounds they hear. Learning the sounds of language is the key to their later recognition of written words and letters. In these beginning stages, participation with adults in activities that involve talk and print lay the groundwork for the later development of reading and writing. Children develop literacy skills as they explore, experiment, and play with language and print in real life experiences during activities that they find interesting.

Parents and other adults play a crucial role in developing literacy skills. Including children in family discussions, reading to them, and involving them in using print around the home can help the child learn new words and develop an understanding of the purpose of reading and writing.

The development of these skills lays the foundation for readiness to learn at school and later success. In contrast, a lack of literacy activities can limit success over a lifetime. A child without basic literacy skills will struggle in school, and be at risk of dropping out of high school.

What can parents do?

-Read with children, cook with a recipe, play cards and board games; involving your children at all stages. Include lots of conversation and questions.

-Watch TV or DVDs and discuss what you are seeing.

-Draw, scribble, do puzzles and complete dot-to-dot pages. Do these with your children.

-Make grocery lists

-Let your children dictate letters and stories while you write down what they say

-Provide feedback in the form of repeating what the child has said and expanding his or her language, e.g., Yes, that is a beautiful picture and it's called a sunset."

-Visit the public library and get your child his or her own library card.

Parents are a child's first teacher and play a crucial role in the development of literacy skills.

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