

# Early Language and Literacy Development: Partnering With Your Library

The development of language skills and a love of reading are absolutely foundational to success in school and life—and this process begins at birth! Good news: babies are born prepared to learn and are wired for language—and everyday interactions offer rich opportunities for encouraging language and a love for reading. In one research study with premature babies, when parents talked to and shared books with their tiny infants, these babies gained weight more rapidly, left the hospital sooner, and when checked later, were more likely to be showing normal developmental progress than babies who had not enjoyed such interactions, indicating that it is never too early to start reading with your child!

## Oral language is the foundation for literacy development

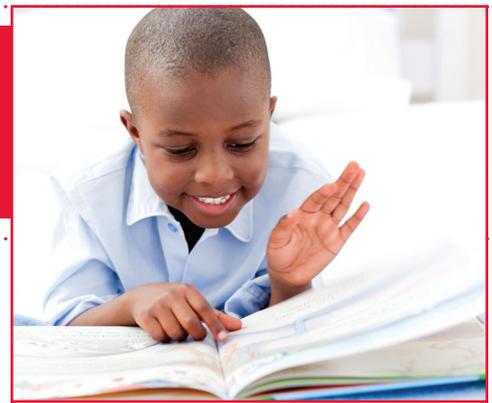
Language skills develop primarily in the context of relationships, through “serve and return” interactions with parents and other adults. **Every** parent, regardless of education, can talk to their child, sharing their own interests and observations, pointing to and naming objects, singing simple songs, or enjoying pictures in a children’s book with their young child.

Unfortunately, when parents do not engage their children in conversation, there is a heavy cost. By age three, children in homes with little conversation have heard roughly 30 million fewer words than children in a language-rich environment. This gap has a profound impact that progressively widens. Young children who have heard fewer words show up at kindergarten with over 2,000 less words in their vocabulary. By 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, that gap may have increased to a difference of 4,000 words. By the third grade, they are far behind in reading. Until the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, children **learn to read**; but after that point, schools expect children to **read to learn**—they have missed the optimal time in which reading is taught.

## Libraries are wonderful partners for parents

Your community library is a terrific partner in introducing children to the joy of reading. Your librarian will suggest books that are appropriate at every developmental stage and which respond to particular interests of the child. Most libraries offer story time activities for young children, using both books and music and drama to expand the stories.

With encouragement, your child will become an enthusiastic and capable lifelong reader. Find your way to the library, beginning by getting your own card to check out books for yourself and your child, and then, obtaining a card for your child at the earliest age allowed by the library!



## There are simple tips for supporting early vocabulary development:

- Use lots of words with infants and toddlers.
- Give simple explanations for new words.
- Respond to the sounds, babbling, words, and/or questions of young children.
- Point out signs as you walk, drive or shop.
- Encourage your child’s natural curiosity and desire to explore.
- Read and play with youngsters, beginning in infancy—and be willing to repeat favorite books often! Interact with your child as you read, asking and answering questions. If your child is in child care, make sure there are plenty of books in the classroom and that the teacher reads to children every day.

