



NURTURING CHILDREN'S  
LANGUAGE AND LITERACY  
THROUGH BOOKS



**Creating**  
**Lifelong**  
**Readers**

Ag cothú léitheoirí fadsaoil

## What is the Creating Lifelong Readers programme?

### THE CREATING LIFELONG READERS PROGRAMME BEGAN AS A COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVE OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE DONEGAL.

The Creating Lifelong Readers programme is delivered through pre-school services and directly to parents through information sessions in the early childhood service. The project comprises of the following key components:

A two-part training workshop is provided for early childhood educators to promote an understanding of the importance of early and consistent exposure to books, language and numeracy for children's holistic learning and development. Participation in the programme also supports the early childhood service to implement key aspects of Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework and Siolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education in the early childhood setting. Each participating childcare service is supported to facilitate an information evening for parents to encourage participation in the Creating Lifelong Readers programme. This will be an opportunity to highlight the importance of nurturing and developing positive attitudes to reading and mathematics in young children and to enable parents to develop strategies to become suitable reading/writing/mathematic role models for their children. The service then begins a lending library whereby children choose books to bring home on a weekly basis and parents and children are encouraged to comment on the books in an individual 'Reading Diary'

## What does the programme aim to achieve?

The overriding aims of the programme are:

- explore the **importance of language** to all areas of the child's learning and development
- appreciate how a child's life can be enormously enriched by experiencing books from an early age and by becoming a successful **reader for life**
- explore how nursery rhymes, raps and songs can develop children's **confidence to explore language**
- demonstrate how children's **emergent literacy and numeracy skills** can be nurtured and supported
- appreciate the importance of promoting **positive images through books** – appreciate diversity of culture, gender and ability
- recognise the importance of being a suitable **reading role model** for young children and understand the role of books to developing parent and child relationships
- provide **appropriate early literacy and numeracy experiences** for children in the home and in the childcare setting
- appreciate the value of different **play activities** to the promotion of children's language, literacy and numeracy development
- raise awareness of services provided by the **local library** and other support agencies.

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## Donegal County Childcare supporting the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2011-2020

In July 2011 the Government launched the National Strategy to improve Literacy and Numeracy among children and young people 'Literacy and numeracy for learning and life' 2011-2020. The strategy is focussed on actions that the education system can take to ensure early childhood care and education, primary and second-level schools provide the best possible opportunities for children to acquire good literacy and numeracy skills. The strategy seeks to address the significant concerns about how well our children are developing in terms of literacy and numeracy skills that they need to participate fully in the education system, to live satisfying and rewarding lives, and to participate as active and informed citizens in our society. Highlighted in the strategy is the need for the early childhood care and education sector to take charge of instilling literacy and numeracy skills into their curriculum plans as a means of ensuring that children are being supported through this area of learning and development right from birth.

# Creating Lifelong Readers

A 'lifelong reader' is a child with, not only the many developed skills of early readers but also, an interest and enjoyment in the actual process of reading, whether it is in books, comics, magazines or any type of print. The most successful way of helping a child to become a lifelong reader is by making the process of reading something that he/she enjoys from an early age.

In helping children to become readers for life, many skills need to be developed; and in developing these skills children are also exploring many of the basic concepts of numeracy development. Although these are two very different concepts they are interconnected in the manner which they can be explored by children.

Reading is essentially the ability to recognise and understand words or sentences but is not a solitary skill. In creating 'lifelong readers', there are 3 key interconnecting skills which are crucial:

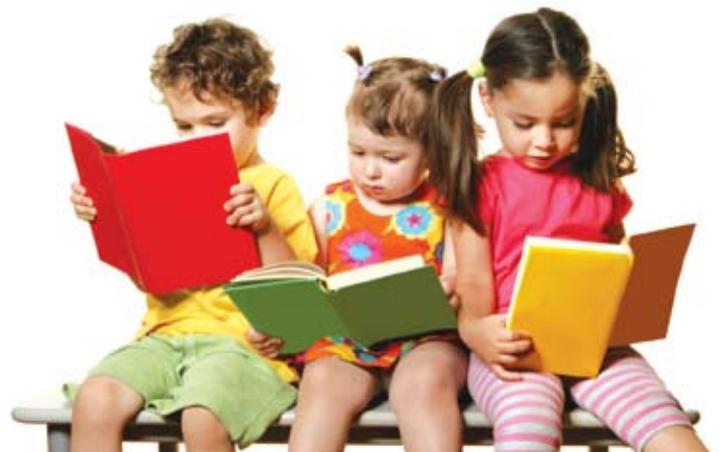
- **communication** (verbal or non-verbal) to acquire, understand and use a wide base of vocabulary

- **early literacy and numeracy** (writing, drawing, number concepts and language) to develop skills necessary to recognise and recreate letters, numbers and awareness of numeracy concepts such as shape, size, measurement and one to one correspondence
- **reading** to be able to interpret what letters, words or sentences mean when put together.

The early years of a child's life are a particularly important period for the development of these skills. They can be easily developed and encouraged in home and early childhood environments through effective adult child interactions and early exposure to communication, literacy, numeracy and reading experiences. When we think of developing literacy and numeracy skills it can be easy to think of it in terms of alphabet repetition, counting etc, however research tells us that this is not the case. Literacy and numeracy skills are developing long before a child will start primary school and begin formal learning.

Right from birth, a baby's brain is programming and re-programming itself to make sense of their world and what they experience in it. Early literacy and numeracy skills will begin to develop right from the baby's first interaction with their parent(s). As a baby's cry is responded to they are making connections between their actions and the response of their care-giver thus building on their awareness of their own communication skills. As a baby progresses into the toddler years and eventually pre-school age they are building on these basic skills at a significantly rapid rate. Their brain is making connections between communication, early literacy, numeracy and reading experiences and beginning to lay foundations for formal learning in the coming years.

For example a child who has been engaging in two way communication with parents and care givers from birth, having books read to them and had experiences of various types of reading materials, will be better equipped to enhance their literacy and numeracy skills than a child who was rote taught to sing their ABC's or count to 10. The reason behind this being that the child will not relate what they are being taught to their current level of literacy and numeracy understanding, that is, the gap between what they know and what they are being taught is too wide. The child may see this merely as a rhyme that is fun to sing, rather than having any value in early literacy or numeracy learning. It is vital therefore that children learn and take on new information based on their current understanding and that we encourage literacy and numeracy learning and development at the right pace appropriate to the individual child. The skills necessary for becoming a 'lifelong reader' are built up, by exposing children to language, nursery rhymes, pictures, books and print, supporting them to build their understanding of literacy and numeracy through the experiences in their day to day lives.experiences in their day to day lives.



## 3 key elements to promoting literacy and numeracy development

# 1. Communication:

*The ability to give, receive and make sense of information*

Communication is essentially how children acquire an understanding of everything around them right from birth, ranging from vocabulary that represents objects, to methods of expressing themselves. Communication can be through verbal means such as babbling, talking / conversing, singing or saying nursery rhymes. It can also be through non-verbal means such as dancing, musical instruments, art, facial expressions, pointing, body movements or gestures.

From birth, a child's communication skills undergo vast developments and changes. Initially, infants communicate through methods such as crying, cooing and babbling. At around 8 - 10 months of age, children can begin to understand what words mean, progress to saying their first words at around 10 – 15 months of age and continue to build up to multiple word sentences and an understanding of a wide range of vocabulary.



## Why is communication important for literacy and numeracy?

Communication provides children with the necessary tools to question, understand and represent all that they see, hear or experience. Having an understanding of a wide base of vocabulary plays an important role in children's abilities to understand what they are reading later on. Right from an early age, as their vocabulary base begins to build up, children begin to link what they see in books, signs and print to words they know or an experience they may have already had. Communication skills are also crucial in further extending children's knowledge for example, reading books can be used to help a child deal with a new experience such as the arrival of a new sibling or to explore different lifestyles and cultures.

Right from birth, children begin to build up an understanding of vocabulary by adults / older children pointing to/naming objects, highlighting concepts and answering the many questions that children ask, for example:

- **What's that?**
- **How many do I have?**
- **Which one is biggest?**

As children progress and develop, they learn to communicate verbally, understand language and recognise that objects and words in print have meaning.

Positive adult/child interactions are crucial to the acquisition of language, vocabulary and communication skills. It is through interactions that adults can explain what words mean and also extend what children are learning through questions and information sharing.

- **What do you think...?**
- **How do you think...?**
- **Why do you think....?**

## How can I support early communication skills?

- Point to and name objects/people for babies and toddlers within their environment for example, door, dog, cup, bus, Mammy, Jack etc. Use picture books and day to day experiences to build up their understanding and use of vocabulary. Name concepts and use them in general communication with children, for example the very heavy bucket, up high in the sky, low on the ground
- Use nursery rhymes, songs and poems that rhyme to encourage children to play around with new words/sounds and to become more secure and confident in using their newly acquired language and to reaffirm numerical concepts, for example 'twinkle twinkle..... up above the world so high....' Children usually enjoy rhyming words and sentences as they are easier to pick up, remember and use in sequence.
- Talk to children, take time to listen to what they say and answer their questions. Avoid surface communication, ask open ended questions and give children the opportunity to lead the conversation. Engage in intellectually stimulating conversations with children, use books, themes and topics to explore new words and support children to understand these new words and relate them to their environment. For example 'excavating tunnels in the sand, skyscrapers etc'.

## The importance of songs and rhymes

Nursery rhymes are often regarded as irrelevant to young children today. This is a grave mistake. Not only do nursery rhymes support children to understand numerical concepts, singing and reciting nursery rhymes is one of the best - and easiest - ways of helping children to develop good reading and writing skills. Why is this? The answer lies in the rhythm and rhyming words. For a child to become a successful reader and writer he/she needs to develop sensitivity to rhythm and rhyme – and nursery rhymes are packed with both.

The ability to detect the sounds that make up words (phonological awareness) is essential to literacy success. The rhythm of the nursery rhyme helps phonological awareness by breaking up the words into syllables, for example In-cy Win-cy Spid-er ... The child who hears lots of nursery rhymes from an early age will develop the ability to segment words without even realising it. When the child starts to write, he/she will have a head start in breaking down words into their separate sounds in order to represent these sounds with letters or letter clusters.

Successful literacy development also depends on the ability to detect rhyme. This leads to the more refined skill of breaking up a word into its initial sound and the end unit which produces the rhyme. For example, w-all/f-all, J-ill/h-ill, p-eep/sh-eep.

Regardless of modern electronic gadgets and novelty toys, nursery rhymes are the perfect way to stimulate and develop a child's confidence in using language. Traditionally, nursery rhymes have been passed on orally from adult to child. Adults

need to continue this tradition, safe in the knowledge that they are making an extremely important contribution to a child's language and literacy development.



# 2. Early Literacy & Numeracy

**Early Literacy:** a child's emerging reading and writing skills before they are able to read or write independently for example, scribbling/drawing, identifying, naming and sounding letters.

**Early Numeracy:** a child's emerging recognition of number and mathematical ideas for example, building, sorting, counting and measuring.

Early literacy and numeracy development does not simply happen; rather, it is a social process, embedded in children's relationships with parents, grandparents, extended family members, siblings, teachers, caregivers, friends and the wider community. Even though we can classify the different stages of literacy and numeracy development as two separate pathways, these pathways are interlinked to such an extent that we cannot take each one in isolation. Children are developing literacy skills while at the same time, through the same experience can be understanding a numeracy concept.

Early literacy skills are the starting blocks which help a child be able to understand that letters are made up by a combination of lines, curves and circles and that when combined together, make up specific sounds, which make words with a specific meaning. Early drawing and writing begins with a lot of experimentation by children using large arm movements. Over time, these movements

become smaller and more controlled by the hand. As this type of hand control and strength builds up, a child's ability to make shapes, lines, curves and circles emerge, which later combine to represent letters.

Early numeracy skills involves having the skills to use numbers and mathematical ideas such as problem solving, measurement and spatial awareness. Children should have access to fun experiences where they are learning how to classify, measure, identify and recognise numbers, count and become familiar with shapes and size. These skills can be encouraged and achieved by involving children in various every day activities in the home such as sorting the shopping, measuring the ingredients whilst baking or cooking and using finger rhymes and songs.

Literacy skills are also being developed through rhymes and songs, reading ingredients, writing a shopping list

and one to one or group reading experiences. It is vital that we as adults are acting not only as role models but also ensuring that children can relate to these experiences in a way that is meaningful to them. For example, when planning a shopping trip involve your child in writing up the shopping list, it is ok for you to scribe as the child is beginning to understand that the shapes and numbers you are marking have meaning and that this can be interpreted in the same way over and over again. The child is also beginning to understand that text reads from left to right and that a number on a page represents a number of physical items.

Interactions and relationships are also central to all children's learning and development. Good quality interactions between the key worker/ staff and children will help build strong relationships especially when the activity is meaningful and enjoyable. Spending one to one time with a child to read them a story which also introduces number concepts such as big, small, colour and number, or activities such as stacking cups, sorters, jigsaws and water or sand play will ensure that concepts are being explored in a fun and meaningful way, in a manner which is comfortable for the child.

## Why is early literacy and numeracy important for lifelong readers?

Early exposure to writing materials such as crayons, paint, markers combined with regular exposure to books helps children to become visually familiar with letters/ words and how to draw and write them. Exposure to number and mathematical ideas from an early age will also build a firm foundation for children to become

confident with numeracy concepts which will ensure they develop a positive disposition towards future numeracy experiences.

## How can I support early literacy and numeracy skills?

- Provide materials such as paper, cardboard, chalk boards, crayons, markers or chalk to explore writing and drawing. Avoid 'teaching' children to write before they are ready as it will happen more naturally if the physical skills of holding and manipulating drawing materials are well developed first.
- Be a good role model for the importance of language, reading and numeracy. If children regularly hear you reading out information, they will begin to understand that different letters combine to make words with different meanings for example, reading out a list while shopping, a swimming pool timetable or label on food.
- Early writing efforts should be praised regardless of how closely they actually represent what a child describes it as.
- Provide an environment that enables early numeracy and literacy skills to flourish, encourage opportunities for children to interact with activities that explore skills such as measuring, predicting, sorting and counting. Have a picnic with your child and ask them to sort the resources needed. Help them count how many plates, cups and forks that are needed and to pick a blanket that is big enough for everyone to sit on.

- Activities such as shape sorters, treasure baskets, sand and water play and looking at picture books can be used with younger children to help strengthen early numeracy and literacy skills as spatial awareness, shape, numbers and language are encouraged.
- Exploring nursery rhymes can also promote both literacy and numeracy concepts for example the nursery rhyme of 'The grand old duke of York' will develop new vocabulary, explore rhyme whilst also developing an awareness of space and position in the rhyme, "when they were up they were up and when they were down they were down"

## 3. Reading Skills:

*The ability to recognise, understand and make sense of words, print or sentences.*

Reading needs several skills such as letter/sound recognition, language/vocabulary skills, and the ability to understand what a word means by sounding out letters and interpreting its meaning. It is through reading with an adult that children learn the difference of sharing information through conversation and reading, i.e sharing information through the medium of print or picture format as opposed to verbal communication and sharing of information.

### Why is reading important for lifelong readers?

Encouraging children to read and to enjoy books from a young age; enables them to develop a positive, lifelong interest in the process of reading as well as being a more successful reader. Reading is a skill that if developed early in life, will give your child a sense of accomplishment and enjoyment for years to come.

## How can I support early reading skills?

- Encourage children to notice print, number and symbols around them and try to guess what it means for example, road signs, signs on doors, maps, etc
- Read together often, on a one to one basis or in small / large groups as appropriate to the children's ages.
- Use a variety of types of reading materials such as books, newspapers and comics.
- Use books as part of daily routines in a childcare setting and as an enjoyable experience between adults and children. For example, have an allocated time each morning when you sit down to read a child's favourite story or before they go to sleep. Remember that it is the children who enjoy reading that will enjoy it throughout their lives.
- Provide a print rich environment for example, names on coat hooks, picture and names on toy boxes, labelling of environment features.
- Let children choose their favourite book, even if they choose the same one often. This is the book they enjoy most and helps children associate reading as something fun and enjoyable. Children often feel secure in knowing what to expect. Encourage children to retell their favourite story or to guess what's coming in advance.

- Provide a wide variety of books for children that are suitable for their age and stage of development (see next section).

## How do communication, early literacy, numeracy and reading skills relate to each other?

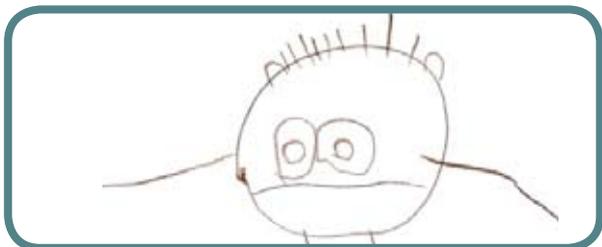
All the skills are connected and crucial in developing 'lifelong readers'. As each skill develops, it has a knock on effect on the other skills. Through the build up of vocabulary, scribbling/drawing/writing, singing and exposure to books, pictures and print as a baby, toddler and pre-schooler, the foundations are being laid for children to make a connection between what words mean, what letters and numbers look/sound like, how words are made up of different letters being put together and what these words mean.

*It is important to note that all of these skills are best developed during day to day routines and don't need to be 'taught'* For example, pointing out animals while out for a walk to extend vocabulary, writing a shopping list together and reading as part of a sleep routine for enjoyment. Focussed or 'taught' reading in the early years may deter children from actually enjoying these processes if they feel pressured.

**Example 1:** When you point to, and talk about, a stop sign on the road with a young toddler while out for a walk, children learn to recognise and understand what a stop sign looks like and what it means. When the child is then exploring books, either picture or text, he/she will be able to recognise the picture of the sign or possibly the word 'stop' and understand what should happen at the sign.



**Example 2:** When children begin to explore using crayons or pencils, they make marks, squiggles and scribbles. As they progress to draw lines, circles, and defined pictures, they start to become familiar with defined shapes and spatial awareness. This type of understanding helps children later write and recognise how letters and words are formed.



## Using Books for Second Language Acquisition

Learning a second language (Gaeilge or any other language) is a great way to boost children's brain power. Educational studies have consistently shown that children who are regularly exposed to a second language:

- have better general reading and comprehension skills
- appreciate diversity and cultural differences
- have increased creativity and problem-solving skills
- have a better grasp of their first / native language and vocabulary
- have an improved ability to communicate
- have better job opportunities.

But how do you begin teaching a young child a second language (Gaeilge), especially if you can't speak it yourself or if you only have a 'cúpla focal'? A great and easy way to introduce a second language to children is through Irish books.

- Start to introduce Irish books when the child is learning their first language. Children, at a very young age, have a great ability to absorb language and in today's world a second language is not a luxury but a necessity.
- Don't ever force it. Gently guide children into the new language journey. Be confident in what you are doing
- Picture books can be used to begin with, which will give you the opportunity to give children Irish vocabulary.
- Teach the Irish words alongside the English words. It's as easy as pointing to a dog and saying 'dog' followed by 'madra'.
- Read often with the child. Many Irish books now have CD's that accompany them.
- Read a variety of materials including picture books, big books and small books, poetry books etc.



## What do Síolta and Aistear say about literacy and numeracy?



Síolta The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Aistear The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework are two Irish practice frameworks designed to support the implementation of quality standards and an appropriate early childhood curriculum in all services for children aged between 0 and 6 years of age.

**Communication, Partnership with Parents and Interactions** are all cornerstone considerations in promoting early literacy and numeracy skills and are interwoven throughout both frameworks.

Encouraging children to communicate through a wide variety of mediums such as books, songs, nursery rhymes, drawing and painting help children to communicate/ understand many of their daily experiences and to further extend their learning. One of the 4 central learning themes of Aistear is dedicated to 'Communicating'. Communicating is a two way process and it is important that adults respond to babies cues and listen to toddlers and preschool children's choices and ideas. It is therefore of great importance that adults are good role models for the children in their care so that children develop a positive and meaningful outlook on literacy and numeracy as they

are promoted and communicated through interesting and stimulating activities.

When we think of promoting children's literacy and numeracy development, the aims and goals of the Exploring and Thinking theme of Aistear also features quite heavily. When children are enabled to explore the environment and given a chance to problem solve and investigate, they can make sense of the world around them and develop new skills. Children will naturally explore experiences that they are interested in therefore it is important that educators and parents ensure that activities are fun for children when exploring concepts and skills such as early literacy and numeracy so that positive dispositions are developed for lifelong learning and enjoyment.

Aistear and Síolta both highlight the significant role that parents play as a child's first educator. Many early reading and literacy skills are developed in the home and continued in the early childhood environment. Through an active partnership between parents and Early Years Educators, the development of each child's attitudes, dispositions and skills in this area can be supported and strengthened. (for further information, see Síolta, Standard 3: Parents and

Families and Aistear Guidelines for Good Practice: Building partnerships between parents and practitioners).

It is through adult/child and child/child interactions that much information is passed on. They are essentially at the heart of the many learning experiences of children and the most effective way of promoting positive outcomes for children's learning and development. While the many skills of early reading and literacy are promoted through interactions, it is also important to remember that it is positive interactions that make many of a child's experiences enjoyable and fun! (for more information on interactions see Síolta, Standard 5: Interactions and Aistear Guidelines for Good Practice: Learning and developing through interactions).



## Providing for Early Literacy and Numeracy in an Early Childhood setting

### The Learning Environment:

Provide a range of reading/writing/numeracy materials in all areas of the learning environment, for example magazines, newspapers, books, pens, crayons, paint, chalk, blocks, counters etc.

#### Ask yourself....

- Is there reading and writing materials in all areas of the environment?
- Are there resources available to children to measure, weigh, count and divide?
- Is ICT available to children on a daily basis?
- Are all materials labelled with both the name and the picture?
- Are there opportunities for children to explore a range of mark making materials?
- How do children explore shape and size?

### Play

Providing a range of play experiences that centre around literacy and numeracy which can be adult or child led, giving children the opportunity to explore concepts through play.

#### Ask yourself....

- Are play experiences with literacy or numeracy learning outcomes planned for within the curriculum?

- Is there an opportunity for child-initiated play centred on literacy and numeracy learning?
- What mechanisms are in place to scaffold children's literacy and numeracy learning?
- Is literacy and numeracy learning included in the assessment process?

### Relationships and Communication

Understanding the adults role and the importance of building strong relationships in the development of literacy and numeracy.

#### Ask yourself....

- Are staff engaging in open ended communication with children
- Are conversations meaningful?
- What opportunities are available for one to one and group communication?
- Do adults demonstrate how to use literacy and numeracy, when to use them and for what purpose?

## How can I develop and promote good reading habits with children?

As previously mentioned, interacting with children (communication skills), use of writing/ drawing materials (early literacy skills) and exposure to books, pictures and print from just a few months of age are key to building early reading skills. The process of reading for children starts with pointing and naming objects / pictures, progresses to pretending to read the story through the illustrations, to recognising some letters / words and finally to reading the text on their own.



- Read with children, not at children. Remember that reading is a social experience. Make sharing books a daily habit that you both look forward to.
- Choose a relaxed time to talk when there are not too many interruptions or too much background noise.
- Enable children to get close to you and to see the full text including the print.
- Personalise stories and rhymes for children, replacing the characters name with a child's name
- Invite children to take story forward themselves
- Change your voice and use sound effects
- Use eye contact
- Tell made up stories to develop children's imagination, allow children to help with the story line or the ending
- Follow a child's lead with books, if they want to stop half way through, that's ok. Their concentration will build up over time the more you read together.
- Encourage children to handle the book and turn the pages (on their own or with help if required). Occasionally trace your finger from left to right to indicate direction of text.
- Point to different parts of the picture and name objects/colours. Encourage children to repeat the names.
- Answer any questions children have about the story. Sometimes children get as much information from what is discussed than the actual story itself for example, if reading about a pig on a farm, children may have more questions about the farm itself than about pigs.
- Encourage children to guess what's going to happen if they're familiar with the story as this builds on his/her memory skills as well as keeping him/her interested.
- Let children 'read' the story to you if they want to, even if this involves him/her making up a story based on the pictures. This is still building on the process of reading.
- Ensure that images displayed in the books children are reading are giving a positive message to children and avoid stereotypical or inappropriate messages based on gender, race, culture, religion or family structure.
- Make up stories with children involving people and places which are familiar to them to help children understand the concept of a beginning, middle and end.
- Be a positive reading role model by reading in the company of children.
- Have fun and enjoy the process of reading with children.

# Practical Reading Tips

## Babies

It's never too early to read to your baby. As soon as your baby is born he or she starts learning. Just by talking to, playing with and caring for your baby every day, you help your baby develop language skills necessary to become a reader. By reading with your baby, you foster a love of books and reading right from the start. The tips below offer some fun ways you can help your child become a happy and confident reader. Try a new tip each week. See what works best for your child.

### Snuggle up with a book

- When you hold your baby close and look at a book together, your baby will enjoy the snuggling and hearing your voice as well as the story. Feeling safe and secure while looking at a book builds your baby's confidence and love of reading.

### Keep books where your baby can reach them

- Make sure books are as easy to reach,

hold, look at, and explore. Remember, a baby will do with a book what he does with everything else — put it in his mouth. And that's exactly what he's supposed to do, so you may only want to put chewable books within reach.

### Talk with your baby - all day long

- Describe the weather or which apples you are choosing at the supermarket. Talk about the pictures in a book or things you see on a walk. Ask questions. By listening, your child learns words, ideas and how language works.

Encourage your baby's coos, growls, and gurgles

- They are your baby's way of communicating with you, and are important first steps towards speech. Encourage attempts to mimic you. The more your baby practices making sounds, the clearer they will become.

### Give baby a hand!

- Encourage your baby to pick up crackers or finger food, touch noses

and toes, point to pictures and grab toys. The muscles in those little hands will grow strong, agile and ready to turn pages.

### Develop a daily routine (and make reading a part of it)

-Routines can soothe a baby, so that a baby learns to predict what will happen next. Make reading time a predictable part of your daily routine.

### Sing, Read, Repeat

- Read favourite stories and sing favourite songs over and over again. Repeated fun with books will strengthen language development and positive feelings about reading.

### "Read" your baby

- Pay attention to how your baby reacts to the book you are reading. Stop if your baby isn't enjoying the story and try another book or another time.

# Recommended Literacy and Numeracy learning opportunities

## 0-6 Months

- Simple picture books with little or no text.
- Books with mirrors/shiny pictures and high contrast colours.
- Books with large simple pictures, preferably some with simple black and white pictures as children's awareness of colour begins to develop at around 6 months of age.
- Chunky/thick cardboard, cloth or bath books which the child won't rip or tear easily.
- Sing songs and finger rhymes such as once I caught a fish alive and twinkle-twinkle little star to build numeracy awareness.
- Clapping songs such as Pat-a-cake and a sailor went to sea, sea, sea.



## 6-12 Months

- Continue using durable books (thick cardboard, cloth or bath books).
- Use washable books as children are inclined to 'eat' or put books in their mouths at around this age and stage of development.
- Introduce touch and feel books with texture, for example, rough/smooth, furry/fluffy patches.
- Use books with pop up pictures or flaps and encourage your child to open them.
- Books with photos as well as pictures especially of other babies or with mirror sections appeal particularly at this age as children can identify with them or see themselves. Alternatively, use a small photo album with pictures of the child and close family members.
- Pictures should be of objects, people or things which are familiar to the child for example a dog, cup, chair, house etc
- Use simple picture books with a central character to encourage the understanding of connections /story within a book rather than various unrelated pictures.
- Add magnetic letters and numbers to the fridge so that your child can explore making patterns.
- Counting rhymes identifying your child's hands, toes, eyes and nose.
- Introduce shape sorters for your child to gain awareness on shape, space and problem solving.

# Toddlers

Being a toddler is all about action. Encourage continued language development and interest in books and reading by keeping things lively and engaging. Everyday experiences are full of opportunities to engage in conversation and develop language skills. The tips below offer some fun ways you can help your child become a happy and confident reader. Try a new tip each week. See what works best for your child.

## **Don't expect your toddler to sit still for a book**

- Toddlers need to move, so don't worry if they act out stories or just skip, romp or tumble as you read to them. They may be moving, but they are listening.

## **Recite rhymes, sing songs and make mistakes!**

- Pause to let your toddler finish a phrase or chant a catchphrase. Once your toddler is familiar with the rhyme or pattern, make mistakes on purpose and get caught.

## **Keep reading short, simple and often**

- Toddlers frequently have shorter attention spans than babies. Look for text that is short and simple. Read a little bit, several times a day.

## **Encourage play that involves naming, describing and communicating**

- Set up a zoo with all the stuffed animals. Stage a race with the toy cars. Put your toddler in charge and ask lots of questions.

## **Every day is an adventure when you're a toddler -**

Choose books about everyday experiences and feelings. Your child will identify with the characters as they dress, eat, visit, nap and play.

## **Ask questions**

- Take time to listen to your toddler's answers. Toddlers have strong opinions and interesting ideas about the world. Encourage your toddler to tell you what he or she thinks. You'll build language skills and learn what makes your toddler tick at the same time.

## **Play to their favourites**

- Read favourite stories again and again. Seek out books about things your toddler especially likes — trains, animals the moon. These books may extend a toddler's attention span and build enthusiasm for reading.

## **Not having fun?**

- Try a different story or a different time during the day. Reading with a very young child is primarily about building positive experiences with books, not finishing every book you start.

# Recommended Literacy and Numeracy learning opportunities



## 12-24 Months

- As children become familiar with books, they start to be able to understand more of what they see in pictures. Introduce books with action pictures for example sleeping, walking, laughing and climbing.
- Small to medium sized books are easier to manipulate by the child as they start to help turn the page, hold the book themselves or carry it around with them.
- Introduce reading as a regular part of a daily routine for example before naptime.
- Simple text or words can be used in books at around this age as it introduces the concept of words relating to a specific meaning, for example, 'cat' in big bold print beside a picture of a cat.
- Different shaped books also help children distinguish between different content or pictures, for example, books cut out in the shape of a dog.
- Use alphabet and counting books for browsing.
- Provide materials for children to explore different mathematical concepts for example, stacking blocks, pouring, carrying etc
- Read stories with numbers, for example The Three Little Pigs

## 2-3 Years

- Basic and easy to follow stories can be introduced.
- Simple rhymes in books help children to predict what's coming when they become familiar with a book.
- Simple plots to stories can be followed at around this age.
- Certain concepts can be introduced such as letters or size.
- Explore concepts such a floating/sinking, light/heavy.
- Play picture bingo to support children to identify matching items
- Some topics could include animals, children, familiar settings/experiences such as the farm or supermarket or modes of transport.
- Use language that helps children to relate numerical concepts to daily life-'half for you and half for me'
- Read signs in shops and when travelling in the car to become familiar with print, number and meaning.
- Involve children in shopping experiences by encouraging them to weigh items and count the items as they are going into the trolley.



## 3-5 Year Olds

Read early and read often. The early years are critical to developing a lifelong love of reading. It's never too early to begin reading to your child! The tips below offer some fun ways you can help your child become a happy and confident reader. Try a new tip each week. See what works best for your child.

### **Don't expect your toddler to sit still for a book -**

#### **Read together every day**

- Read to your child every day. Make this a warm and loving time when the two of you can cuddle close.

#### **Give everything a name**

- Build your child's vocabulary by talking about interesting words and objects. For example, "Look at that airplane! Those are the wings of the plane. Why do you think they are called wings?"

#### **Say how much you enjoy reading**

- Tell your child how much you enjoy reading with him or her. Talk about "story time" as the favourite part of your day.

#### **Read with fun in your voice**

- Read to your child with humour and expression. Use different voices. Ham it up!

#### **Know when to stop**

- Put the book away for awhile if your child loses interest or is having trouble paying attention.

#### **Be interactive**

- Discuss what's happening in the book, point out things on the page, and ask questions.

#### **Read it again and again**

- Go ahead and read your child's favourite book for the 100th time!

#### **Talk about writing too**

- Mention to your child how we read from left to right and how words are separated by spaces.

#### **Point out print everywhere**

- Talk about the written words you see in the world around you. Ask your child to find a new word on each outing.

# Recommended Literacy and Numeracy learning opportunities

## 3-5 Years

- Books that represent your child's daily life as well as books that inform children of how other children live, for example, in other cultures, countries or family structures.
- Themes can be chosen based on what your child is interested in, for example, trains, swimming or a particular character from a television show.
- Stories and text can be longer, more elaborate and contain a particular message, for example about moving house, going to the doctor or getting a new brother/sister.
- Encourage your child to use ICT, help them send an email to their grandparents or relatives, making a birthday card on the computer and attaching it to the email.
- Enable your child to make clear connections between experiences for example "that book is bigger than yours", "you are smaller than me".
- Use resources such as thermometers, clocks, weighing scales and tape measures available for your child to begin exploring early numeracy concepts.



## Nursery Rhyme Books

- Nursery rhyme collections introduce children to books as well as to rhymes. You will find lots of nursery rhyme collections in your local bookshop or library.
- Even the newborn is tuned into sounds and rhythms of the human voice and will benefit from a gentle nursery rhyme. While older children can explore nursery rhymes in their written forms, younger children can simply learn the rhymes by heart.

# Questions often asked by parents

## **We speak our native language at home with our baby, is this ok?**

*Yes, in the early years, it is the habits and skills of the reading process that are important. As children later acquire additional languages, they can translate meanings and words then.*

## **I'm a very weak reader and nervous of reading with my child, can I do anything to develop early reading skills?**

*Yes, parents can consider storytelling that doesn't involve a lot of print for example, drawing a picture with their child and making up a story about it, looking at photos or pictures from magazines and telling stories about what is happening in them or using magnetic fridge letters and symbols to make short words or pictures.*

## **I'm on a very limited budget, where can I access books that are suitable for my child?**

*Use the library to access a wide variety of books for free. Remind adults that it's the quality of books and time reading with children that matters, not the quantity of books that they have access too.*

## **I never enjoyed maths at school. How can I ensure that my child has a more positive experience than me?**

*Make numeracy experiences fun and meaningful for your child. If they have an interest in imaginative play, set up a restaurant and encourage them set out the number of places they need, space needed at each table and make a menu with prices of each dish. The most important thing is that your child is interested in the experience and this will help build a positive foundation for future learning with numbers and mathematical ideas.*

## **Does it matter who reads to my child?**

*No, children will benefit from the close interaction and reading process regardless of who reads to them, for example, Grandparents or Siblings. Sharing early reading and literacy practices provides a very effective means of interacting with children.*

## **How can I be a good reading role model for my child?**

*This can be easily demonstrated to children by parents actively involving children in regular reading and literacy practises for example, writing a shopping list, reading a bus timetable or pointing out road signs.*

# Library Services

Information on library services for pre-school children, parents and early childhood services.

Donegal County Library has a wide range of material available for information and recreation. Access to books is recognised as the most important factor in children's reading development. The library is a gateway to the world of knowledge for children and stimulates imagination and creativity. Libraries throughout the county have picture books for younger children and early readers for children who are beginning to read for themselves.

## Library Membership

- Membership of the library is free to all borrowers
- Book loans are free
- Anyone can join the library, by bringing along proof of address. Under 18's need a guarantor
- Children can borrow up to 10 items at a time, including 3 junior DVD's/ Video's and CD's
- Audio visual membership is free for junior members
- Adults can borrow up to 10 items at a time
- Pre-school facilities can avail of free block-loan membership which allows them to borrow up to 35 items for up to 12 weeks at a time

## Library Events

Donegal County Library, in conjunction with other Cultural Service Departments, host "Wainfest", a festival of books, arts and music for children of all ages every year in October. Various other activities are held throughout the year, including exhibitions and author visits. Some of the other library events organised for children include Heritage week, Seachtain na Gaeilge, Library Ireland week, National Science week, Poetry Day, World Book Day, Book Clubs and Summer Reading Schemes. Weekly Rhyme Time or Pre-school storytelling is also available in many libraries.

See the library website [www.donegallibrary.ie](http://www.donegallibrary.ie) for contact details, opening hours and to find out what's happening in your local library. You can also search the library catalogue and reserve items for collection at any library or Taobh Tíre centre around the county.





D.C.C.C.

**DONEGAL COUNTY CHILDCARE COMMITTEE LTD. IS A LOCAL GOVERNMENT-SUPPORTED AGENCY THAT WORKS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT, SUSTAINABILITY AND ADVANCEMENT OF HIGH QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION IN COUNTY DONEGAL.**

## **DCCC VISION:**

“ To excel in the development and support of quality childcare in County Donegal to bring about positive outcomes for children and families ”

## **DCCC MISSION STATEMENT:**

“ Proactively working in partnership and effecting positive change with our partners, providers and key stakeholders and implementing the National Childcare Investment Programme on behalf of the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in County Donegal. ”

## **Donegal County Childcare Committee Ltd...**

**VALUES** the ‘whole child perspective’ including children having opportunities to learn and develop, to be healthy and protected from harm, to feel a sense of individual identity and self worth, to think and express their views and to have a ‘voice’.

**RESPECTS** early childhood as a distinct phase to nurture positive attitudes for lifelong learning, enjoyment and achievement through the provision of enriching, challenging and enjoyable play experiences.

**ENDORSES** national practice guidelines for quality early childhood care and education including Síolta: the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework

**PROMOTES** quality services for children and families and considers training and continuing professional development as fundamental to the provision of quality early childhood care and education practice and provision.



**D.C.C.C.**

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