

# Seeds

# of Learning

Literacy education starts the day your child is born.

Parents can use every-day activities to help their children learn basic skills.

## Pre-literacy skills prepare youngsters for success

Today's toddlers are expected to have a wide range of pre-literacy skills already under their belts when they enter kindergarten. But how, exactly, are parents supposed to ensure that their little ones are getting the right pre-education they need before entering school?

Although it may seem mystifying at first, parents can use every-day activities to help their children learn basic skills—including identifying letters, numbers, and shapes—as well as more advanced skills in carrying on conversations, knowing how to interpret sounds, and understanding common print concepts (e.g., that we read words from left-to-right and top-to-bottom of a page).

### Starting early

Literacy education starts the day your child is born. Experts say that parents should be reading and talking to their infants every day. Babies can understand language long before they are able to speak. Talk to your baby often about what he is seeing, hearing, feeling, and doing. Imitate your baby's sounds and smiles to encourage early conversation.

“Having your infant hear you speak and make sounds helps him learn to develop speech patterns,” says a speech pathologist. “Parents can talk to their babies about what they are cooking for dinner or any other daily activities. They also can read them the newspaper or a magazine.”

Once your child starts to focus on the world around him and begins to make verbal sounds, it's time to choose books in his or her age range—simple pictures



and text. It can be confusing and even discouraging for a little one to try to focus on too many objects on a page. A good guide to remember is:

- Cloth or board books with animal sounds are ideal for babies as they are often easier for a child to attempt to imitate than “real” words;
- Simple books with a single word on each page are great for toddlers; and
- Books with lots of predictable and repeated short sentences or phrases are easier for preschoolers follow.

When reading to your child, try to engage him in the reading process. For example, point to objects in the book and name them; change your voice as you read aloud and make the sounds of the animals the baby sees in the book. Ask your baby questions about what's happening on the page, such as, “Where is the duck?” Pause, point, and answer for baby, “Oh, there's the duck!”

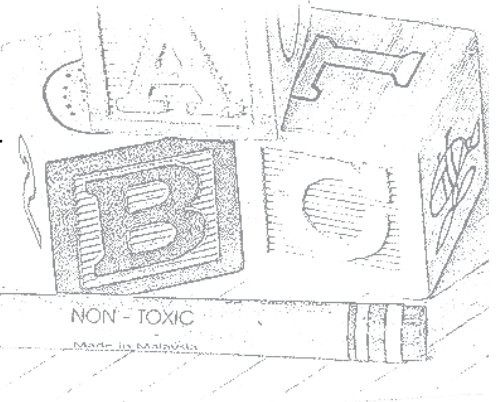
“In addition to educating a child, books also entertain,” says a media specialist. “By ensuring that your child's literacy and reading skills are sound, you're not just giving them the key to academic achievement, you are also giving them the lifelong gift of gaining endless pleasure from literature.”





## Six pre-literacy skills your child needs

Reading—and reading often—to your child from a young age is one of the best ways to incorporate literacy into her life. A panel of reading experts determined that there are six specific early literacy skills that form the building blocks for reading and writing. And, research indicates that children who enter school with more of these skills are better able to benefit from the reading instruction they receive when they arrive at school.



**1 Vocabulary.** Most children enter school knowing between 3,000 and 5,000 words. Knowing the names of things is an extremely important skill for children to have when they are learning to read. It helps them make a connection with the object and the letters used to spell the object. Help develop your child's vocabulary by reading a variety of books with him, both fiction and nonfiction, and by naming objects in your child's world that you and he may encounter throughout the day. While naming these objects, explain that there are other names for the same things. For instance, if you are playing toy cars with him you could explain that "vehicles" and "automobiles" are other words that can be used for the word "car."

newspaper, magazines, etc.), and keeping books accessible to children (in baskets on the floor, on the bottom shelf of a bookcase, and in bags in the car.) "I have a basket of children's books and magazines in every room of the house, including the kitchen and bathrooms," says the mother of a four-year-old and one-year-old. "No matter what room we are in we are always within reach of a stack of books."

**2 Print Motivation.** This is a child's interest in and enjoyment of books. A child with print motivation enjoys being read to, plays with books, pretends to read books to you or younger siblings, pretends to write, asks to be read to, and likes to take trips to the library to discover new books. Parents can encourage print motivation by making reading a special event (e.g., the whole family sits down to listen to a book that each child and parent has selected for shared-reading time), letting your children see that you enjoy reading (cookbooks, novels, the

**3 Print Awareness.** This includes learning that writing in English follows such basic rules as text flowing from top-to-bottom and left-to-right of a page, and that the print on the page is what is being read by someone who knows how to read. An example of print awareness is a child's ability to point to the words on the page of a book. You can help sharpen a child's print awareness skills by pointing out and reading words everywhere you see them—on signs, labels, at the grocery store/farmer's market, post office, etc.

**4 Narrative Skills.** This is when a child is able to understand and tell stories, and describe things he sees. Having these skills is important so that children can understand what they are learning to read. An example of a narrative skill is a child's ability to tell, with a fair amount of detail, what happened during a recent birthday party, a trip to an indoor play arena, or while playing with friends. Help your child strengthen her narrative skills by asking her

to tell you about the book you are reading to her, instead of having her just listen to you read. Also encourage your child to tell you about things he has done that have a regular sequence to them. For example, before it's time for bed, ask him to tell you about what he needs to do (i.e., brush teeth, wash face, go to the bathroom, get undressed, put on pajamas, put dirty clothes in the hamper, pick out a bedtime story). "Narrative skills also teach your child how to converse because they are learning to ask and answer questions and to elaborate upon answers in a sequential way," adds an early childhood education expert.

**5 Letter Knowledge.** This means learning that letters have names and are different from each other, and that specific sounds go with specific letters. An example is a child's ability to say the name of the letter "B" and what sound it makes. Letter knowledge can be developed by using a variety of fun reading and writing activities such as pointing out and naming letters in alphabet books and on signs, playing with alphabet refrigerator magnets, and tracing letters in a workbook or on a dry erase board. For

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babies, talk about shapes of things (i.e., a plate is round, a piece of bread is square, etc.), and for preschoolers, try drawing letters and simple pictures (sailboat, stick dog, balloon) in the sand and explain what you are drawing.

**6 Phonological Awareness.** This is the ability to hear and manipulate the smaller sounds in a word. It includes the ability to hear and create rhymes, to say words with sounds or pieces left out, and the ability to put two word pieces together to make a word. Most children who have difficulty reading have trouble in phonological awareness. Playing fun word games with your child can help improve her phonological awareness skills. For example, make up silly words by changing the first sound in a word—change cup to gup, lup, nup, rup. Also try saying words with a pause between the syllables (“rabb” and “it”) and have your child guess what word you said. Also, read your child stories with rhymes (traditional Mother Goose stories) or books with unusual words (Dr. Seuss books are great!).

## Help your child get ready to read

**Here are a few things you and your little one can do together to foster a love of books, reading, and learning:**

- ▶ Visit your local library’s free story hours for babies, toddlers, and preschoolers.
- ▶ Talk, sing, and tell stories to infants and young children throughout the day. Use short, simple sentences.
- ▶ Encourage your children to talk to you about their day, or about anything.
- ▶ Read books with your children for at least 10 minutes a day, beginning at infancy.
- ▶ Limit television time to less than two hours a day for children ages two and older. Children younger than two years old should not be watching television. (Recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics.)
- ▶ Keep your children’s books accessible—on low shelves, in baskets on the floor.
- ▶ Be a good role model. Read in front of your children (cookbooks, newspapers, novels, magazines), and explain how reading and writing help you to get things done every day.
- ▶ Choose childcare providers who understand the importance of reading and talking to children.

*“I have a basket of children’s books and magazines in every room of the house, including the kitchen and bathrooms. No matter what room we are in we are always within reach of a stack of books.”*



# Seeds of Learning



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Check out all the Schalmont information on our  
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Spring 2010: **Literacy**

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# MARK YOUR CALENDAR

## Kindergarten Screening

All 3 Schalmont elementary schools will be holding Kindergarten Screening for those students who are or will be of Kindergarten age (5 years old on or before December 1, 2009.) Please call the school your child will attend for an appointment if you have not already made one.

**Jefferson Elementary School:** Kindergarten Screening appointments during the week of **May 10-14, 2010**. Please call Mrs. Koskey at 355-1342 x5080 for an appointment.

**Mariaville Elementary School:** Kindergarten Screening appointments on **May 7, 2010**. Please call Mrs. Wolbert at 864-5411 x6018 for an appointment.

**Woestina Elementary School:** Kindergarten Screening appointments on **May 6, 2010**. Please call Mrs. Jones at 887-5600 x6530 for an appointment.

## Don't forget to vote...

on the **Schalmont School Budget on May 18, 2010**. Polls will be open from **6am to 9pm in the High School New Gym Foyer**.

## If you have concerns about your child's development...

The Schalmont Central School District wants to help ensure that children receive any special services they may need as early as possible.

If you are concerned about your child's development in any area, first speak with your pediatrician. If you still have questions or concerns, please contact Shari Lontrato, chairperson, Committee on Preschool Special Education at 887-5600. She can help begin the process of determining what services your child may need before entering school. For more information on the special education process, go to [www.schalmont.org](http://www.schalmont.org), click on Special Education and follow the link to the preschool information.

## Visit Schalmont on the Web

Visit our informational website at [www.schalmont.org](http://www.schalmont.org)

