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Connecting Big Plans' Parents to their Communities

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20 Minutes to Learn Together Celebrating Literacy Day January 27th

ABC Life Literacy Canada encourages families to "Take 20". Take 20 minutes to make learning together part of your everyday. Engaging in literacy activities as a family improves a child's skills and also helps adults keep their skills sharp. Here are a few ideas to get your family started!

1. **I wonder why?** Go online as a family and learn something new. Ever wonder why the ocean and sky are blue?
2. **Read ANYTHING!** A book, blog, magazine or letter from grandma. Read together and get in your 20 minutes each day
3. **Be a Rockstar:** Sing along with the radio or do Karaoke – maybe a duet?
4. **Make something yummy:** Follow a family recipe or create a new one together.
5. **Travel the world:** Your library card is your passport to travel the world and to take a learning journey.
6. **Jot that down:** Write an e-mail, letter, blog post or text your family and friends. Which is the most fun?
7. **Scientist in the House:** Do a kitchen experiment or mix up a batch of playdough.
8. **It goes something like this:** Tell your favourite story and give it a new ending, or take turns making up a new story.
9. **Crafty Crafter:** Paper, glue, yarn, paint – so many things to create! Do a craft together.
10. **Stepper challenge:** Go for a walk and count your steps. How many steps to school, the park, your friend's house?
11. **Deal me in:** Playing cards and keeping score is a fun way to practice counting.
12. **Tell it to me:** Tell someone about your day at dinnertime or pick-up the phone for a chat. What was the best part?
13. **Shopper Time:** Make a grocery list together with kids finding what's on the list and checking off the items (and maybe adding one special treat!)
14. **I'm on Staycation:** A vacation at home can be lots of fun. Plan a trip in your neighbourhood.
15. **Riddle me This:** Tell jokes and riddles while doing chores around the house – can you stump your parents?
16. **Know your hood:** Draw a map of your neighbourhood, adding in important places like school, library, doctor and pet store!
17. **Game-ON!** Play a board game and plan a family game night – invite your neighbours.
18. **Story Dynamo:** Make-up a story and draw a picture to go with it. First, show the picture to your friend and see if they can tell you what your story is about.
19. **Building Buddies:** Build something together with modeling clay or building blocks. Check out what Family Literacy Day Honourary Chair Barbara Reid can do with modeling clay!
20. **Did you Know?** Teach someone you know something new. Did you learn why the ocean and sky are blue yet?



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Have a look at the great illustrations Family Literacy Day
Honourary Chair, Barbara Reid created to Take 20!
<https://abclifeliteracy.ca/fld/activity-ideas>



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The Pleasures of Reading Aloud

by Betsy Mann

There are lots of reasons to look at books and read aloud to children, starting when they are very young and continuing well after they can read for themselves. It's a time to enjoy moments of relaxation and closeness, to share interests and explore the world. In addition, experts suggest that reading to children 20 minutes a day improves their chances of success in school. Here are some ways to make the most of your reading time.

The starting position

Your physical position communicates your interest and caring. Place yourself at child level, cuddled on the sofa or bed or sitting on the floor together.

Suit the book to the age

Babies explore books through all their senses, including taste, so choose cloth or cardboard books that will take heavy wear and tear. Later, toddlers are interested in naming things in books with one picture per page. Gradually, children become interested in the stories in books, first very simple ones, then progressively longer and more complicated stories. Eventually, you may be reading longer books over a period of days or even weeks, one chapter at a time.

Follow their interests

Choose a book that suits the child's age and interests. Younger children may lose interest before you arrive at the last page. That's okay. The goal is to make reading fun, rather than to get to the end of the book.

Adapt the text

You can adapt a book to the age of the child you are reading to. For young children, try just describing the pictures or telling the story in your own words. You might also change the names of the characters to names of people the child knows.

Catch children's attention

Bright colours and clear illustrations catch children's interest. You can hold the attention of a squirming child with books that have moving parts—flaps that lift, scenes that pop up, pieces that go into slots. Build on what you know interests them: an activity they enjoy, an animal that appeals to them.

Make your reading dramatic

Making your reading dramatic will also keep children interested in the story. Emphasize the rhythm in nursery rhymes. Use gestures and point to what you're talking about in the pictures. Change

your voice for different characters in the story and make sounds for the animals. Encourage the children to imitate you and join in the fun.

Involve children

When children have heard a story several times already, you can involve them by pausing to let them fill in the next words. Some stories have a refrain that makes this easy, for instance, "I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down!" in the Three Little Pigs. Just letting a child turn the page can keep him or her involved in reading.

Ask questions

From time to time, stop and ask questions about the pictures or the story. Even before a child can talk you might ask, "Can you see where the wolf is hiding?" If a child is learning to count, you could ask, "How many cats do you see on this page?" Draw older children into the action by asking, "What do you think will happen if Goldilocks eats the porridge?"

Respond to questions

Take time to answer the children's questions too. For children who don't yet say many words, just pointing at a part of an illustration may be a question. Respond by naming whatever the child is pointing to. Older children might ask why a character did something. Pause in your reading to discuss their ideas.

Over and over again

Children love to hear the same book read over and over again—much to the dismay of some adults who would like a bit more variety. Be patient with this preference for familiar material. Repetition is part of the way children learn the words, the concepts and the story that a book contains.

Keep it up

When your children can read for themselves, you can take turns reading to each other. The good feelings of these moments spent sharing the pleasure of books will last many years.



At home Activity

This would be a good transition song to sing while getting ready to go outside in the cold!

The Mittens on My Hands

Tune of
"The Wheels On The Bus"

The mittens on my hands
Keep me warm
Keep me warm
Keep me warm
The mittens on my hands
Keep me warm
All winter long



Are You Talking With Your Child On a Daily Basis?

Are you aware of the opportunities for parent-child conversation in your home? Whether it's eye-to-eye or shoulder-to-shoulder (on a walk, in the car,) talking with your kids is vital to creating a connection and doing our job as parents.



Why does this matter?

1. The brain is built by an interactive process known as serve and return because it is very much like a game of tennis or volleyball. A child begins with a gesture or sound - the "serve" - and you respond with the "return. When parents respond sensitively, a child is surrounded by positive serve and return exchanges which are the building blocks of a healthy brain. (AHS- Our Brains Apple Magazine, 2013)
2. In the first 8 years of development, our children need to have eye-to-eye conversations so that they can watch us and learn how to move their mouths properly (speech-therapy referrals are increasing).
3. Older children need this connection because they have lots going on and need to talk about it with someone. If they are not talking with you, they are likely talking with their peers. Their peers may not be able to share the values that you would want to share. Peers also may have expertise in all sorts of things that you would rather your child did not learn.

This week, take a look at what's happening in your family.

- Are you making space for conversation?
- Are there times when the devices are off and you are talking with your child?
- Is it happening in the car, at the dinner table?

If you don't like what you see, get rid of the guilt and change the behaviour. Find ways to set your family up for success, by creating small, intentional spaces for conversation and connection.

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WINTER FUN

Not a fan of cold weather? Don't think your kids will last more than a few minutes outside in freezing temps? Check out these gross motor winter activities to get kids up and moving and keep them entertained in the snow! They'll be having so much fun, they won't even notice those cold toes!

Gross Motor Activities

- Play hopscotch by jumping and creating footprints in fresh snow. Have someone follow in your footsteps, trying not to fall out of them!
- Run in deep snow with boots on.
- Play hot potato with a snowball!
- Fill some trash bags with snow and let your little one pretend they are the garbage man filling up and pulling their "garbage truck" (sled) as they go!

For more activities including fine motor and sensory visit <https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/winter-activities-kids-2>



Outdoor
Winter Activities
for kids

How to Help Your Child Have a Successful Morning

Brooke Brogle, Alyson Jiron & Jill Giacomini

Do you struggle with stressful mornings when you want to lay your head down and cry before 8:00 a.m.? Do you often leave the house in an angry, frantic rush? Mornings can be a particularly challenging time for parents. Getting your entire family up and out the door is no easy task! It is important to understand that your morning routine serves as the foundation for your family's entire day. You can create a morning routine that not only helps your day to begin more smoothly, but also teaches your child important skills that he needs to become more independent and confident. A morning routine can also reduce challenging behavior such as crying, whining and tantrums.



Try This at Home

- Use a visual schedule with items such as photos, clipart, or objects that shows your child the steps in his morning routine. This visual schedule can help him to understand the expectations of the morning routine. To learn more about how to create a visual schedule, go to challengingbehavior.org and search the site for "visual schedules" in the search box located in the upper right-hand corner of the screen.
- If your child has trouble waking up in the morning, it might be because he is not getting enough sleep at night. Set a consistent bedtime and stick with it. When a child's bedtime changes it can make it harder for him to wake up in the morning. For more information on bedtime routines, go to challengingbehavior.org and search the site for "bedtime routines" in the search box located in the upper right-hand corner of the screen.
- Plan Ahead. Use your bedtime routine to plan for the next day together.
 1. Lay out the clothes your child will wear.
 2. Pack his backpack.
 3. Discuss the morning routine, show him pictures and talk about the day ahead.
- Give your child some power over his morning routine by offering reasonable choices. For example, "First, get dressed. Then, you get a choice! Would you like to have cereal or pancakes for breakfast?"
- Include bonding time in your morning routine. Time to read, bathe or snuggle will help your child feel loved and calm as he begins his tasks for the day.

- Encourage your child. When your child completes a task and follows the routine, provide positive and specific encouragement. For example, say "Wow! You got up and got dressed all by yourself! Now we will have a few extra minutes to play with trains. What a great way to start the day!"



Practice at School

Teachers use routines to provide a predictable structure to your child's day. When a child understands what she should be doing and what will come next, she feels less anxiety and more excited to participate. While the specific activities in the classroom might change, the routine does not. For example, while 10:00 may always be art time, the specific craft (painting, cutting, gluing) may vary from day to day. Children become eager to try new activities because they are confident and comfortable with the routine.



The Bottom Line

A morning routine is a daily opportunity for you to build and nurture a positive relationship with your child. When you follow a repetitive morning routine you allow your child to gain practice with important skills such as dressing, bathing and grooming and give him a feeling of confidence and success. A calm, loving morning routine at home sets the tone for the entire day for both you and your child.

Is My Child Ready for Kindergarten?

By Ben Mardell and Melissa Tonachel

Q: I have a child in preschool. How do I know if he will be ready for kindergarten when the time comes?

A: As a parent, you know your child better than anyone else. Pay attention to the things she says and does. Children come to kindergarten from a wide variety of experiences, and settings, so expecting them all to know and be able to do the same things is unrealistic.

Is your son excited about school? That's a good sign. Beyond that, it would be great for him to have some experience with the following things:

- listening to others and taking appropriate turns for expressing ideas and questions;
- handing materials respectfully and putting them away;
- sustaining engagement with an activity or process;
- identifying and pursuing his own interests, choosing materials and having some ideas about how to engage with them productively;
- being safe in relation to the group (staying within school bounds) and attending to personal needs (washing hands); and
- asking for help when he needs it.

He may have begun to develop other habits and skills but they may not be fully developed in preschool or even by the end of kindergarten: solving problems with peers, taking the perspective of others, increasing his stamina, and building academic mastery, for example. Hopefully, on the first day of school, your child will enter kindergarten with joy and the confidence that school is a good place to be—a fun, fair, and good place to learn.

Ben Mardell is associate professor and program director of early childhood education at Lesley University in Cambridge, MA. Melissa Tonachel is a kindergarten teacher in Boston, MA. Source: Adapted from an [online Q&A](#) published in 2011.

<https://families.naeyc.org/learning-and-development/child-development/my-child-ready-kindergarten>



www.challengingbehavior.org

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