



better beginnings

EVERY CHILD DESERVES OUR BEST

Looking, Listening and Leaping for Literacy!

A Note from [Better Beginnings](#) Program Manager Dawn Jeffrey

A, B, C...1, 2, 3, [Raising a Reader](#) is so easy! Okay, let's get real. I know what you're thinking.

"There isn't enough time in the day!"

"What? I'm not a teacher. What if I do it wrong?"

"My child hates books!"

Listen. I'm telling you...no I'm PROMISING you, this is doable. It's a lot more simple than you think.

That's good news, too, because literacy skills are a huge part of [prepping your child for Kindergarten](#). Don't worry, though. We are not talking about reading books aloud from front to back. When I say literacy skills, I mean simple things like letter recognition, rhyming or taking turns in conversation.

There is more good news. You can start teaching these skills early. Did you know your child begins to develop literacy skills as early as [four months](#) when she simply sees a picture in a book, and he may begin to show interest in the story as early as six months?



Literacy skills go way beyond Kindergarten too. Your child will carry these skills into adulthood, and likely use in her daily routines. It really is the skill that keeps on giving—the foundation of learning.

You do not need a full set of lesson plans and a closet full of classroom supplies to jumpstart your child's development of literacy skills. Better Beginnings believes the best way to assure your child is receiving [quality education](#) is by [Learning through Play](#).

You heard that right. You can teach your child important skills by playing pretend, [acting out a story](#) or joining a game of eye-spy. Honestly, it's a win-win situation. Your child will be more engaged

if you let loose and get silly with her, and I think I speak for all of us grown-ups when I say, we could ALL use a little more silly in our lives.

The key word here is “engage.” Get hands-on. Think out-of-the-box. I am not saying a nightly bedtime story isn’t enhancing literacy skills, I’m just reminding you that even the most mundane tasks hold a literacy lesson. What does your child see? What does she hear? What action is he doing?

Street signs. Sing-a-longs. Hopscotch! [Literacy is all around us](#), and it’s up to you to open your child’s eyes to that magic.

Raising a Reader
Baby's First Year
Read to Your Baby.

At a Glance

Birth to 6 months
Babies can see well. High-contrast books help them learn.

At 6 to 9 months
Baby can grasp objects now. Give her color and soft textures she can feel without hurting herself.

At 9 to 18 months
Baby may become more interested in the story than listening to the words.

At 18 to 24 months
Baby can turn the pages of books. Provide colorful board books as your baby becomes more active.

At 24 months
Baby can turn the pages and name familiar objects.

Talk and Sing to Your Baby
Your baby is captivated by the sound of your voice. Hold her as you sing and say rhymes, like "The Hokey Choo" and "Baby Bumblebee." Make eye contact to let her know you are talking to her.

Read to Your Baby
To show a book with your infant, hold it up and hold the book about a foot from your baby's face. Hold it still for her to look at while you talk about the pictures. Let her reactions guide you. When she has had enough she will let go of the book.

Baby's First Books
First books don't need a story. Point to pictures and ask, "What's that?" Make up a story or repeat the name of the object again and again in a sing-songy voice.

Babies from one year to 18 months
Babies from one year to 18 months are not fully developed at 18 months. They can't see details. They can't really see color until about 18 months of age. High-contrast books and simple images in board books. These images help the visual part of her brain develop.

"Touch" books
"Touch" books provide lots of different textures for baby to touch. They give you a chance to introduce new words like "touch," "smooth," "soft," and "rough." By 18 to 24 months of age, baby is able to hold objects, she will enjoy color and soft vinyl books. Books go through to the mouth just like every other object it is a bit of a natural.

Children Read!
By 18 to 24 months your baby will make sounds such as "ba," "da," "ma," and "na." Give her simple books. Take turns making the sounds. Add new words. Show your baby talking!

Books as the basis of speech and language
Language is the foundation of literacy.

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Click here to visit our Resource Library. You'll find activities and tips to help you prepare your child for this.

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Raising a Reader
Toddlers 1-2 Years
A Time and a Place for Books? Always, everywhere!

What to Expect
Call your preschool books are great for toddlers. Books used to help teach toddlers to explore and to play with.

Books open minds
Visit the library. Bring home books about your toddler's favorite things: trucks, dinosaurs, dolls, baby animals or machines. Use picture books to teach names, colors and numbers.

Make reading fun!
Use different voices for characters.
Make sounds that go with pictures.
Ask questions: "What's that?" "What's that?" "What's that?"

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Raising a Reader
Preschoolers 3-4 Years
Make sure your child is ready for kindergarten.

Language
Understands a variety of words for objects, for actions and to describe things.
Understands who, what, why and when questions.
Can follow three-step directions.
Can hear to do verbal responses.
Tells detailed stories or ideas.
Speaks clearly enough to be understood by most people.
Takes turns in conversation with others.
Responds to the English language.
Speaks and expresses self in English.

Developing Literacy
Learns to use and recognize the letters he needs.
Participates in singing songs and saying rhymes.
Knows letters from sounds and personal experiences.
Sends letters to make signs. For example, car and stop.
Holds books right side up, turns pages like at a story.
Knows how to look.
Recognizes print they see in their everyday life.
For example, sign, signs and signs for their story and their story.

Recognize and name some letters of the alphabet, especially letters in their own name.
Produces the correct sounds for some of the letters of the alphabet.
Writes some letters correctly, especially those in their own name.

Click here to see the entire Kindergarten Readiness Checklist developed by the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education. You will find tools of skills for other topics such as math, science and music.

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Walk-N-Talk | Looking for Literacy

Anytime you can get [outside](#) and learn with your child, do it. Well, when the heat isn't intolerable, at least. A simple walk around the neighborhood or your local park provides plenty of opportunity for your child to learn new words. It gets you and your family moving too!

Street signs are great for this. They are big and colorful and they usually come in all sorts of shapes. Another good thing about them is they stay put. So, if you keep your walking routes the same, your child will see them over and over. Repetition is critical to your child's learning retention.

Try a matching game. At the beginning of your walk, teach your child the shape and color of a particular sign. Then, let him point to other objects of that shape and color throughout your walk. Start with a stop sign. What else is red? What else is round? If your child recognizes letters and numbers, label what else starts with that letter, or find things that rhyme with that word. The wonderful thing about this activity, is you can always take it to the next level. Eventually, your child will sound out the letters and words on the signs. You can even try asking

your child to write the letters and words he remembers while he enjoys his post-walk snack. Even better, ask him to tell you what he remembers seeing on the walk. See how many details he includes.

Let your child take in the rest of your surroundings too. Ask all of the who, what, when, where and why questions. ANSWER all of them too!

PS: This would also be an ideal time to teach your child his address.

We have two ears and one mouth for a reason! | Listening for Literacy

Talking to your child is something you can start during his [first year](#). He might not understand you, but he hears you. Try talking through your daily routines like putting him to bed, brushing your teeth and eating breakfast. Don't forget to make eye contact! He is paying attention, and don't be surprised when he coos and babbles back! In fact, have fun with that! Respond to those precious attempts at conversation. This is the beginning of his speech journey! Enjoy this stage. It will pass quickly.

If you have been blessed with the gift of music, you will love this one. If not, *do-re-mi-fa-so-la-ti-DON'T* let that stop you! (See what I did there?) Songs are repetitive and most kid-friendly tunes are energetic. That's your child's love language--easy to remember and fun! Try singing and dancing to *Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes!* With the little ones, point to each and ask, "What's that?" Again, she may not understand the question or have the answer, but practicing this repeatedly will teach her more than you think. Challenge your older toddlers to skip one of the words each time. Ya know, "Head, shoulders _____ and toes. _____ and toes!" Try it opera-style or as your child's favorite character. This will inspire creativity and keep them from getting bored.

Think your child is too young for songs and dances? No way! Put that little one on your hip and have a dance party. Have older ones and younger ones? Great! Get the whole band together with these [DIY instruments](#). Let the band warm up by telling you what sound each one makes. Who knows? Maybe you guys will be the next Von Trapp family!



Turnin', Burnin' and Learnin' | Leaping for Literacy

Just like my thoughts on getting outside, if your child can work on literacy skills WHILE exercising, JUMP on it! For the older ones, this is a great time to work on action words. Try a basic game of Simon Says first. Just give simple commands at

first. Jump. Hop. Skip. Run. Walk. Sit. Stretch. Dance. Push. Pull! Sounds like a workout, right? My heart is thumping just thinking about it.

Your child isn't so sensitive to cardio, though. If she is crawling, she is probably more like a mix of *The Energizer Bunny* and *The Little Engine that Could*. Am I right? Well, use this to your advantage. Just like your child learns from seeing things over and over, and hearing things over and over, she learns by doing over and over.

Games like this [Simon Says Roll](#) activity (for the older ones) are excellent for working on following directions and speaking in sentences too. Following three-word directions and forming four- to six-word sentences will help your child in [Kindergarten](#). Games also teach your child how to take turns, another important skill needed for Kindergarten.

Oh, and WARNING: The above may cause uninterrupted naps and 7:30 bedtimes.

So, you see, [Raising a Reader](#) really is not that scary. Literacy is so much more than advanced vocabulary and reading comprehension. Literacy improves your child's social skills. This helps her have good conversations and form meaningful relationships. Literacy helps your child emotionally, empowering her to use her words to explain how she feels. Literacy supports your child mentally. It is a set of skills that she will need to be successful in other subjects like math and science.

With all that being said, don't let the importance and complexity of literacy convince you this is something you cannot handle. When you remind yourself that literacy skills can be taught with these simple activities, it just sounds like making a lesson out of the everyday things you are going to do anyway. Right?

I mean, street signs aren't exactly a rare sighting. Chances are, you hear at least one song a day. And even on the laziest of all rainy Sundays there ever was, you're going to have to move around just a little bit.

No lesson plans needed. You do not need a lengthy supply list. All I am suggesting is to bump your normal routines up the tiniest of notches. Isn't it cool to think about your child's relationships that will grow, the education she will focus on and the confidence she will build all from learning some words?

It's. That. Simple.

AND. That. Rewarding.

Seeing. Hearing. Doing.

Looking. Listening. Leaping.

LEARNING.

Be sure to follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) to stay caught up with the Better Beginnings community. You can also sign up for our monthly newsletter, *The Buzz*, [here](#).

All the best,

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