

25 Do's to Promote Early Literacy Experiences

For Early Childhood Educators

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- 1 Read aloud to children at least once a day, and more often if possible. A few minutes at a time is fine!
 - 2 Read to children for enjoyment. Do *not* try to teach children how to read.
 - 3 Choose board books with heavy pages, rounded edges, and uncluttered pictures for babies. Around 12 months, share flap books for peekaboo experiences. For toddlers, when they are ready, choose books with paper pages and just one or two sentences per page.
 - 4 Make sure you have books at a reachable level in several places around your rooms, including near toys.
 - 5 Visit the public library regularly and borrow many great books to share with your children. Find books that you like, and share them enthusiastically!
 - 6 When you see a toddler looking at a book, sit down and share it with him.
 - 7 Let toddlers help turn the pages. Point to words occasionally—but not all the time, and not every word. By doing this, children will start to develop print awareness—the understanding that the squiggles on the page are words that you are reading.
 - 8 Talk about the illustrations and photographs in books, and ask young toddlers simple questions about what they see in these pictures.
 - 9 When young toddlers can talk, ask simple questions about the story, and have them identify familiar objects.
 - 10 In conversations with children, talk about books you read together earlier in the day.

- 11** Re-read favorite books. Children both love and learn from repeated readings.
- 12** Label some objects in your rooms so that children can see the printed words, to gently foster print awareness. Limit labels to three or four at a time, because children will ignore them if labels are overdone or overwhelming. Also, change the labeled objects after a few days.
- 13** Talk to babies and toddlers throughout the day and during daily routines, such as during diaper changes.
- 14** Introduce a few new or unusual words to children daily. Say the word and explain it briefly. This will help children gain vocabulary.
- 15** Read and sing nursery rhymes every day, and when sharing them clap or sway to the beat, make up other motions, or act out some of the words.
- 16** Share lap rhymes, finger and hand rhymes, toe and foot rhymes, and bounce rhymes every day.
- 17** Sing songs with your children daily. It does not matter if you are a good singer! By singing songs somewhat slowly, children can hear the different sounds that make up each word, which helps with their phonological awareness.
- 18** Songs should be short, have a limited vocal range, include repetition, and have an easy musical arrangement. "Echo" songs are especially effective, because children can repeat a word or line right after hearing it.
- 19** Use movement and motions with songs, such as swaying and clapping, and provide simple props, such as scarves.
- 20** Provide some musical instruments for children to use. Good instruments for these ages are wrist bells, shakers, rattles, maracas, jingle sticks, sandpaper blocks, and small drums.

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- 21 Play has a vital role in the development of early literacy skills. Rather than emphasizing academic skills, your curriculum should focus on opportunities for open-ended and guided play. Explain to parents that play is far more important and effective in their child's learning than academic "enrichment."
- 22 Introduce colors, numbers, and alphabet letters, but do not drill children or force them to learn. Children will learn naturally when you read books and provide educational toys that relate to these concepts.
- 23 Open-ended play experiences should include water play, sand play, modeling with play dough and clay, painting, blowing bubbles, and scribbling or drawing with large crayons.
- 24 Provide play-related centers that encourage literacy, emphasize print, and allow for pretend play experiences. For example, provide writing tools and paper in a writing center, or empty food containers (e.g., boxes, plastic bottles and tubs) and grocery lists in a home or other pretend-play center.
- 25 Toys should be safe and developmentally appropriate for babies and toddlers. Check guidelines recommended by the National Association for the Education of Young Children for suggested toys for each age (visit www.naeyc.org/toys). Also see "Age-appropriate toys" at the BabyCenter website (www.babycenter.com).