

# 25 Do's to Promote Early Literacy Experiences for Fours and Fives

## For Early Childhood Educators

- 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. Children pick up basic literacy skills as they listen to the story, and most importantly, they develop a love of reading.
- 3 For babies, choose board books with rounded edges, touch-and-feel books, and simple flap books. For toddlers, choose books with paper pages; large, uncluttered illustrations; and just one or two sentences per page. For preschoolers, pick a variety of books, including classics, folktales, participation stories, song picture books, and rhyming stories.
- 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, ask the librarian for suggestions, and borrow many great books to share with your children. Find books that you like, and share them enthusiastically!
- 6 When you see a child at your center looking at a book, sit down and share it with him.
- 7 Let children help turn the pages when sharing a book one-on-one. Point to words occasionally—but not all the time, and not every word. This will help children start to develop print awareness, the understanding that the squiggles on the page are words that you are reading.
- 8 As toddlers become verbal, ask simple questions about the story and illustrations, and ask them to identify a familiar object or the color of an object. Ask preschoolers more complex questions about the story: What happened first? How would the story be different if [a character] were changed to [a different character]? Which character would you like to be and why?

- 9 Reading to children is a great way to develop perspective (understanding the viewpoints of others). Talk about the emotions shown by the characters. Ask the children how they think a character might be feeling. Point out things in the illustrations; for example, “Look at the bear. I don’t think he sees the skunk behind him.”
- 10 In conversations with children, talk about books you read together earlier in the day.
- 11 Reread favorite books. Children both learn from and love to hear 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. Change the labeled objects after a few days.
- 13 Talk to children throughout the day and while doing daily routine tasks, such as diaper changes.
- 14 Introduce a few new words to children daily. Say the word, and briefly explain it. This will help children build vocabulary. Unusual words have a special appeal.
- 15 Read and sing nursery rhymes each day. Clap, sway to the beat, make up new motions, or act out some of the words for added enjoyment.
- 16 Share fingerplays, rhymes, and simple poetry with preschoolers.
- 17 Sing songs with children daily. It does not matter if you are a good singer! When you introduce songs, sing them slowly. This allows children to hear the smaller sounds that make up each word and supports the development of phonological awareness.
- 18 Songs should be short, have a limited vocal range, include repetition, and have a simple musical arrangement. “Echo” songs are especially effective, because children can repeat a word or line right after hearing it.

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- 19 Use movement and motions with songs, such as swaying and clapping, and provide simple props, such as scarves.
- 20 Provide musical instruments for children to use. Good instruments for these ages are wrist bells, shakers, rattles, maracas, jingle sticks, sandpaper blocks, and small drums.
- 21 Play has an active 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 children'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 (and in context) 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 children. Check guidelines recommended by the National Association for the Education of Young Children for suggested toys for each age (visit [www.naeyc.org/toys](http://www.naeyc.org/toys)). Also see "Age-appropriate Toys" at the BabyCenter website: [www.babycenter.com/0\\_age-appropriate-toys\\_5.bc](http://www.babycenter.com/0_age-appropriate-toys_5.bc).