

Parent Guide

? Why should I support my child's language and literacy development at home?

“Family engagement in schools contributes to positive student outcomes, including **improved child and student achievement, decreased disciplinary issues, improved parent-teacher and teacher-student relationships, and improved school environment**” (Henderson & Mapp, 2002)

“Parent involvement leads to positive benefits for students, parents, and schools, including **improved academic performance and improved parent-teacher relationships**. Students whose parents were involved in school during their elementary years experienced **lower rates of high school dropout, were more likely to complete high school on time, and had higher grades.**” (Barnard, 2004)

“A comprehensive review of the literature on family engagement in early childhood found that **all families from diverse socioeconomic, educational and racial/ethnic backgrounds were interested in their child's educational success and could effectively support their child's learning at home** and school when provided with the information and guidance that they needed” (Van Voorhis, Maier, Epstein, & Lloyd; 2013)

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Conversations & Questions

“...the quality of adult-child interactions is as important as the quantity or amount of conversation for children’s cognitive and literacy development (*National Reading Panel, 2000; Owocki, 2001; Shickedanz, 1995*) ”

Talk to your child, and always make an effort to be responsive and engaging when they talk to you. A key strategy for fostering quality conversations with your child is asking open-ended questions. While closed questions usually only elicit one-word responses, open-ended questions encourage thoughtful discussion.

More closed questions → → → → → → → More open-ended questions	
Did you go to gym today?	What was the most interesting/exciting/frustrating thing that happened today?
What is the name of the book you are reading?	Tell me about what you’re reading/watching? Tell me why you like or dislike it...
Did you like that (<i>movie/book/meal/experience</i>)?	What did you like (or dislike) about that?
Do you think the character in the story should do that?	If you were in the same situation as the character, what would you do? Explain why you’d do that.
(<i>when reading</i>) Do you think the main character will _?	What do you think the main character will do next? If you were the main character, what would you do? Explain why.

Even with great questions, children may give short answers. Don't be discouraged! Keep the conversation going by asking children to elaborate on their responses:

- Tell me more about that
- Explain why
- How do you know...
- Why do you think...

Self & Parallel Talk

You can increase your child's language exposure by frequently engaging in self-talk and parallel talk. Self-talk involves narrating your own actions aloud to your child. Parallel talk involves narrating your child's actions aloud to them.

Example of self-talk:

"I see this beautiful purple eggplant on the grocery store shelf! I've never tried eggplant before, I think I will buy it so we can learn how to cook it. Maybe I will try to bread it and fry it up like fries."

Example of parallel talk:

"Oh, I see that you're smiling! You're picking up two apple slices. You're offering me an apple slice. Thank you! Now you're grabbing your toy truck. I wonder what you'll do with the truck? Oh, you're pushing the truck toward the plate."

Helping with Homework

When helping your child with schoolwork/homework, you can increase language learning and comprehension by using the following strategies:

- **Think-Aloud:** When modelling how to correctly complete homework, verbally narrate your thought process, so your child can both see and hear what you are doing (Ex. *"First I'm going to start with a capital letter because I know that we should always start a sentence with a capital letter... now that I've explained my answer, I'll put a period to show that this is the end of my sentence. Now, I'll go back and read what I wrote. I'll check for mistakes. Hmm... did I spell this correctly?"*)
- **Paired Problems:** Have your child work through a homework problem while you serve as the teacher/coach (talking them through the steps needed to solve

the problem). For the second problem, switch roles: complete a question while your child acts as the teacher/coach.

- **Explain My Solution:** This strategy works best for math. Have your child complete one question and then explain to you how they solved the problem.
- **Share My Evidence:** Ask your child to form an opinion of what they're reading, and ask them to share how they arrived at that conclusion (What evidence did you use from the text?)
- **Vocabulary Detective:** If your child is struggling with a word, walk them through the following strategies to figure out what the word means:
 - Context clues - Can we guess what the word means based on the rest of the sentence/text?
 - Word parts - Can we break the word up into parts? Do you recognize any parts of the word? (the root word? the prefix? the suffix?)
 - Replacement task - If we plug in a word that we know, does the sentence make sense? (Ex. If we replace the word '*loathe*' with '*hate*' would the sentence "*I loathe broccoli, so I never eat it*" still make sense?)

Environmental Print and Visuals

Exposure to and interaction with a variety of text/print in the home and school environment is key to children's language/literacy development. This can include road/business signs or print (posters, labels, decor) that you have put up in your own home. Prompt your child to interact with the text that they see:

- What does that say?
- (*pointing*) What letter is this?
- Can you find the letter *b* (capital or lowercase letter) on this?

Visuals (videos, pictures, real objects, maps) can be a great conversation starters and a crucial tool for teaching vocabulary. Ask your child to describe a picture or object in detail or make a game out of it by describing an object/picture and having your child guess what object/picture you are describing.

Reading with Children

Improve your bedtime story game with the following strategies:

- Before you start reading, go on a brief **picture walk**. Flip through a few pages looking just at the pictures. Ask your child to describe what they see or make predictions about what they think will happen based on the pictures.
- Highlight and reinforce the direct link between print and spoken words by practicing **voice-to-print matching** (point to each word as you read or have your child point).
- Stop occasionally to talk about what you've read so far. Ask your child **open-ended questions** about the text. Ask them to make predictions about what will happen next. Ask them to speculate on a character's actions ("Why do you think s/he did that?"). Ask them to put themselves into the story ("what would you do if...?")
- After you finish reading, **talk about what you've read** (*What did you like/dislike about the story? What is your opinion about...? How did your predictions line up with the actual story?*)