

Flying start with literacy

Activities for parents and children



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EDUCATION

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Introduction

Children need good literacy skills. They are the bedrock upon which all other academic learning is based. It is therefore understandable that this is an area where parents really do want the best for their children. The good news is that parents can make a real difference. Recent research clearly indicates that those who actively engage in activities with their children promote both intellectual and social development.

The aim of *Flying start with literacy* is to enable parents and carers to assist children between the ages of three and six in developing the foundations underpinning literacy. There is no mystique in encouraging a child to acquire good literacy skills. In fact, as parents you are probably already doing many of the things that will make a big difference. Using this book will help you to be more aware of what you are doing, so that you can do 'more of what works' as effectively as possible.

Flying start with literacy is divided into seven chapters, with each focusing on an important aspect of development: listening; talking; music, movement and memory; storytelling; print awareness; tuning into sounds; and basic writing. Each chapter outlines the significant skills, knowledge and concepts children need to be successful readers and writers, and give you – the parents – ideas for activities to enhance these. There are also answers to a range of frequently asked questions. Pages 94–95 provide further information on recommended resources and useful websites for those parents who may wish to explore the issues raised at a deeper level.

The important thing about encouraging a child to develop good literacy skills is to relax and have fun. In today's competitive world there are many pressures on parents, but children learn best when they are enjoying themselves. When they feel that they are under pressure, they can 'switch off' and lose interest. It is also important to realise that all children learn differently, and the fact that one child may absorb something more quickly than another does not make them more intelligent. Remember the hare and the tortoise? It may take some children longer than others, but with the right support they can all get there in the end. Lastly, we have sometimes used 'he' and sometimes 'she' throughout the book, but most of what we have to say applies equally to boys and girls or fathers and mothers.

This book will assist you to give your child the necessary support for him to gain a flying start in literacy. We know that you will both really enjoy the process.

Ros Bayley Lynn Broadbent

chapter one

Learning to listen

Listening is perhaps the most important of all the communication skills. If young children cannot listen, they cannot learn, and learning to listen is now harder for children than it has ever been. We live in an increasingly noise-filled world where television, video, DVD and computer games fill our homes with sounds. Life is lived at a faster pace than ever before, and noise is all around us. We simply don't have as much time to listen to each other as we used to. However, with a little positive action you can help your child to become an excellent listener.

In the first instance it is helpful to know a little about the skills involved in listening, as this will help you understand exactly what your child is learning when you play our suggested games. As you play the games he will learn four important skills: discrimination of sounds; social listening; how to develop his aural attention spans; and how to stimulate his auditory memory.

Discrimination of sounds

The ability to detect a foreground sound against background noise is the most basic of all the listening skills. In order to learn language, children must single out their mother's (or their teacher's) voice from the irrelevant background noise of their surroundings. They must also be able to hear your voice in a busy supermarket or pick out their friend's voice in a playground. Once they are able to single out one significant sound, children must learn to distinguish between a widening range of noises: for example, a telephone, a dripping tap or a fire engine. This sort of discrimination needs to come before children can hear similarities and differences in words and the sounds of individual letters.

Playing the following games will really help your child to develop these important skills, which are essential for later work in reading and writing. (See chapter 6 Tuning into sound for further information.)

Statues

You will need: some lively music with a strong beat.

This old party game is an excellent way to teach your child to identify sounds. It can be played quite easily with just one or two family members. In fact, in our experience, young children enjoy this game even when they are the sole player. Tell the players that they can dance to the music but when you shout 'stop' over the top of the music they must freeze like statues. Go on to explain that when you shout 'go' they can begin to dance again. Vary the game by using different kinds of signals: for example, by blowing a whistle or banging on a saucepan.



A listening walk

This is an activity that can happen naturally as part of your daily routine. Any time you are out walking, encourage your child to listen to the wide variety of sounds all around. Get him to spot bird song, dogs barking, neighbours' voices, lawn mowers or the hubbub of the traffic. Play a game where you count how many different noises you can hear. You could also try this activity in a variety of locations.



Spot the sound

You will need: a collection of items from around the house that make a noise: for example, a squeaky toy, a saucepan lid, a timer or alarm clock, or a bell. Encourage the child or children to listen carefully to each sound. Then play them again but behind a screen and see if the children can identify what has made the sound. A good alternative is to play the game the other way round. Let your child make the sounds for you to guess. When you put them in control, children learn really quickly.

Who is it?

You will need: a dictaphone or a tape recorder on which you or other family members and friends can record a message for your child.

Once you have made a collection of voices, play them to your child and see how many he can identify.

I spy with my little eye

This is an excellent game for developing auditory discrimination. It can be played as soon as your child can hear beginning sounds, that is, the sound that the word begins with as opposed to the name of the letter itself. Say 'I spy with my little eye something beginning with ...' (for example, 'd' for 'dog'). Play this game in a variety of locations such as in the garden, kitchen or car.

Answering the telephone

Whenever possible, let your child answer the telephone. Prime other members of the family not to say immediately who they are but to ask your child if he can guess who it is.