

# Let's Talk Literacy – February 2013

## **Preschooler Reading Milestones**

Young children begin to recognize familiar words. Your young child may learn whole words that she can see, like STOP signs, before she learns individual letters. Young children may also learn logos and symbols, so, as they pass familiar restaurants, they may point out a known letter, such as "big M."

Young children learn that stories have a clear structure and specific elements. As your young child listens to stories, he learns that all good stories have a beginning, middle, and end. He also learns to predict, based on the book cover, what the story will be about, as well as what might happen next or how the story will end. Young children learn that there are characters in stories and that the setting (where and when it takes place) is something that a listener would want to know. Your child will enjoy comparing the characters in a book to himself and to other real life people he knows.

Your young child may "pretend" to read. Children who have been read to frequently will pretend to read books to themselves or to their toy dolls and animals, using their own words or phrases from the story. Parents and caregivers may also observe young children incorporating pretend reading into their play—"reading" a recipe as they make a cake or "reading" a shopping list as they put groceries in their basket.

Young children become aware that the world is filled with letters. During the preschool years, many young children will be able to recite or sing the alphabet. They may begin to recognize familiar letters, especially letters in their own names, followed by letters from parents', siblings', and friends' names. Finding familiar letters in their homes, at preschool, or in the grocery store is very exciting for young children, and they will let parents and caregivers know when "I found another big N!" or "Hey, there is the little t!"

### **Encouraging Your Preschooler**

- Read and reread your young child's favorite books every day. Reading books with rhymes helps develop a child's awareness of the sounds in our language, an ability that is often associated with reading success in the early grades. If you have ever read "Green Eggs and Ham", you will always remember the repetitive refrain, "I do not like green eggs and ham. I do not like them Sam I am." Young children also delight in predictable books with memorable refrains.
- Read books with a variety of characters. All children should have the opportunity to read books with characters that look and speak like them. At the same time, children also enjoy reading stories about fantastic characters, such as talking animals that stimulate their imagination and build on their love of pretend play.
- **Enjoy rhyming books together.** Children enjoy books with rhyming patterns. Young children find the use of nonsense rhymes playful and fun. As you read, invite your child to fill in some of the rhyming words.
- As you read, point out the important features of a book. Before you start reading, show your child the title and author on the front of the book. You might say, "The title of this book is 'Amazing Grace'. It is written by Mary Hoffman and the pictures are by Caroline Birch."
- As you read, point to each word with your finger. This demonstrates to your child that there is a one-to-one match between the spoken and written word. It also draws your child's attention to the link between the words you say and the words on the page. Pointing as you read also reinforces the concept that we read from top to bottom and from the left to the right.
- Use stories to introduce your child to new words. Focusing on new vocabulary words increases reading comprehension. You can promote your child's vocabulary development by drawing his attention to new or unusual words in the story. It's important to just have fun with these new words and help your child use them in real-life situations. After learning "capsize" in a story, you can point out that the toy boat in your child's bath has capsized and the animals are now in the water.

#### Kindergartner Reading Milestones

By the end of kindergarten, most children can recognize and write upper and lower case letters. They also learn the sounds associated with most of the letters of the alphabet. Most kindergartners can tell you that B says "b" and M says "m" and can incorporate letters and sounds into games they play like "The Name Game" and "I Spy." Children typically master consonant sounds before vowel sounds because it is harder to hear the small differences among some vowel sounds.

Most kindergartners can read some words and simple books. Children in kindergarten recognize some words by sight or by looking at them and recognizing them as wholes. Kindergartners' "sight words" often include their own names, the names of classmates, and words they use frequently in their writing, such as "Mom," "love," and "the." They also learn words they see around them, such as "STOP" and "EXIT." Many can read "families" of words such as "cat," "bat," and "mat." By the end of the year, many kindergartners are able to "read" familiar books by recognizing a few words, remembering what the story says, and looking at the picture.

Kindergartners learn that writing goes from left to right. They learn that we read to the end of a line and return to the left to read another line. They learn where a printed word begins and ends and learn the difference between a word and a letter. Many can match spoken words to the words in books. They even begin to recognize and learn the purpose of common punctuation marks such as periods and question marks. Having a solid understanding of what print is and the way it works is necessary for learning to read.

Kindergartners can understand more than just the plot of a story. They are able to extend their thinking and discuss why events happened and why characters acted as they did. They can also make reasonable predictions about what will happen next and relate the story events to events in their own lives. Being able to discuss stories they listen to now will help children make meaning later on when they are able to read independently.

#### **Encouraging Your Kindergartner**

- Let your child read the words and offer help only when it's needed. By the end of kindergarten, many children can read simple books containing short, common words and books that follow a predictable pattern. Most children rely heavily on pictures and their memory of the story to help them read. Young readers benefit from practice, and they take great pride in showing off their new skills to adults. As your child reads to you, you can help out and provide words if he gets stuck, but try not to step in before you are needed.
- Let your child "share" the reading with you. Not all children can read books independently at the end of kindergarten, but all can share reading with an adult. The child who recognizes only a few words can chime in and read those words in the text. Most can fill in a rhyming word in a shared reading. For example, if you read, "Have you ever seen a bear combing his \_\_\_\_\_?" your child will probably provide "hair" as the correct rhyme.
- **Keep reading sessions short.** Reading can be hard work for kindergartners. It is a complex activity that requires a delicate orchestration of skills, including paying attention, looking carefully at print, remembering sounds of letters, and using language prediction skills. Kindergartners expend a lot of energy reading, so if your child shows signs of frustration, it is definitely time to stop.
- Encourage your child to track the print with a finger, pointing to each word as she says it. This habit will reinforce the idea that printed words represent spoken words and that print goes from left to right in English. You can also ask your child to find words she knows in the text or to find a word that starts with a certain beginning sound. Asking your child how she knew the word was "kitten" and not "cat," for example, will help improve her awareness of the strategies she is beginning to use in reading.
- **Don't limit reading to books.** Reading is a skill that we use regularly in our everyday lives, so encourage your child to read at times other than at book time. Having your kindergartner read street signs, look over your shopping list, follow a simple recipe with you, and read a menu with you are all ways that you can extend reading beyond books.