

Especially for practitioners working with infants! 

Literacy-Rich Classroom and Community Activities

Literacy-Rich Experiences

What is the practice?

Many everyday family and community activities are good times to expose infants to literacy-rich learning for the first time. The places infants visit and the people they meet on outings are great sources of literacy learning. This practice guide includes everyday routines and activities for learning communication, language, and the early stages of reading and writing.

What does the practice look like?

This practice is about children being involved in everyday activities that provide opportunities for literacy learning. This practice guide provides ideas for how infants can be part of hearing sounds and words. It explains how to expose infants to familiar pictures and symbols and how to introduce them to reading and writing. This can be something as simple as looking at a cereal box at breakfast. It can also be something more formal, like infant story times at a public library.

How do you do the practice?

There is a list of family and community activities at the end of this page. This list includes things that children in your care might already do on a daily basis. Increase children's involvement in such activities and guide them and assist them while they take part. This is the heart of the practice.

- To start, pinpoint which activities are most likely to be fun and pleasing to the child. The more engaged he is during activities, the more likely he is to learn communication and language skills during them.
- Join in on the activities with the child. Become aware of what he is most likely to do. Listen for the noises he might make. Look for pointing, reaching, excitement, and other behaviors that show his interest and delight in an activity.
- Talk about what the child is doing. Describe the things at which he is looking, touching, and with which he is playing. Use short, descriptive sentences ("You see the kitty. Nice kitty! Her fur feels soft").
- Respond to any attempt on the part of the child to communicate or vocalize. Repeat what he does or says. This tells him that his attempts to communicate with you are working.
- Encourage the child to take the lead and "show you" what he is doing or at what he is looking. Give him many chances to "get your attention." The more chances he is given, the more likely he is to want to "tell you" what he is doing.



How do you know the practice worked?

- Does being involved in an activity get the child to communicate using gestures or sounds?
- Does the child seem to understand or get excited when you use words to describe what he is doing?
- Does he show more interest in starting or continuing an activity?

Take a look at more activities in classroom and community

Rhymes & Singing

Sandra is 7 months old. She has become greatly interested in any kind of parent-child play that involves rhymes and singing. Her home visitor taught her to play Peek-a-Boo. When Sandra hears Baby's Eyes or listens to her mother recite Rock a Bye Baby, she squirms and chuckles with joy. Sandra's home visitor and mother brainstormed about ways to include moments of play with rhyming and singing in their everyday routines. Now Sandra's mother plays Peek-a-Boo while changing Sandra's diaper. She plays I'm Gonna Get You while she feeds Sandra and This Little Piggy while getting Sandra dressed and undressed. She recites These Are Sandra's Fingers while they play together on the floor. These are just a few of the ways Sandra's day is now filled with these language and literacy-learning activities.



Action Plan

Bryan, 12 months old, and his mother spend a lot of time on the go. They visit friends, run errands, shop for food, and take part in local events. One of Bryan's favorite things to do at home is have mom or dad read him stories. Bryan's home visitor suggests some fun ways to support Bryan's interest while out and about. Mom and the home visitor make a list of places Mom and Bryan often go. Then they discuss how Mom can provide Bryan reading and storytelling experiences in these places. They include the local library, bookstore, recreation center, supermarket, a neighbor's house, and a children's theatre. Bryan really looks forward to what he will get to do next!

Exhibit: Examples of Literacy-Rich Classroom and Community Activities

- Scribble with crayons or magic markers.
- Play with blocks or letter magnets.
- Listen to music.
- Play Peek-A-Boo and So-Big.
- Play finger games or clapping games.
- Play rhyming games.

- Play with puppets or stuffed animals.
- Talk on the telephone.
- Pretend to talk back and forth on the phone.
- Visit the library.
- Go food shopping.
- Go on family car and bus rides.



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Literacy-Rich Word Activities

Literacy-Rich Experiences

Anyplace, anywhere, anytime, a child's neighborhood and community are rich in sights and sounds. These are likely to catch his interest and increase his listening and talking. Using language with young children in neighborhood and community activities will expose them to a world of words. Give the babies with whom you work many chances to visit places that offer early reading, talking, drawing, and writing opportunities.

What is the practice?

This practice uses formal and informal language and literacy learning activities. It can expose and introduce a child to listening to storytellers, reading books, playing word games, and so much more. Taking part in these activities creates opportunities to learn all kinds of pre- and early writing and reading skills.

What does the practice look like?



For several months a mother and her son have been going to a mommy and baby play group. This planned time with other infants and moms is filled with songs, games, and stories. Their best liked activity is a simple version of the song "Row, Row, Row Your Boat." The little boy likes this rhyme game because he enjoys moving back and forth while all the mothers sing. He even sits up by himself and reaches his arms out to his mother. This lets her know he is ready to play!

How do you do the practice?

Here are some ideas about places to go and things to do to involve babies in literacy-rich neighborhood and community activities.

- Start by identifying things the child likes to do. If something is fun for him, chances are he will benefit from being involved in it.
- Look for places to go or things to do that involve activities that match the child's interests. Find places that will provide him with lots of literacy-learning options.
- Formal activities include library story times, storytelling at parents' -morning-out programs and reciting nursery rhymes at parent and child play groups. Look for a beginner's art workshop for wee ones who might enjoy drawing and finger painting. Also take outings to book stores, recreation centers, and similar places.
- Informal activities might include saying nursery rhymes at a friend's house or listening to songs at a music store. When dining out, look at a menu with the child. Going to a bookstore's children's section or talking to the child when at a petting zoo are other informal activities. Almost any everyday activity can provide a chance to talk, listen, and learn.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does the child get excited when involved in the activities?
- Does she try to do part of the activities?
- Does the child vocalize to get someone to keep doing an activity?

Take a look at more fun with words

Walks and Words

Paige is 13 months old. She and her caregiver, Carter, enjoy walking near her house. Carter carries Paige in a baby backpack so she can see all that is going on. On their walks, Carter points out both well-known and novel things. He points to a neighbor's dog and crouches down so Paige can pet him. "There's Skipper!" Carter says. "Do you want to pet him?" Carter describes what Paige is doing. He asks her to "tell him," using gestures or sounds, what she wants to do next. Paige sees a neighbor walking toward them. She starts to get excited and makes sounds as the person gets closer. Paige starts a "conversation" that includes many chances to listen and "talk" with her neighbor and Carter. These outdoor walks are filled with lots of talking, listening, and communicating. Paige loves all the attention!



Fine Times To "Talk"

At 7 months old Wyatt enjoys going out with his caregiver, Lori. Two of his favorite things to do are going to a baby exercise class and swimming at a public pool. He likes them a lot because there is so much to see, do, and hear. He is "all ears and eyes." The baby exercise class includes lots of nursery rhymes, fingerplays, and singing that Wyatt enjoys so much. The infant swimming class includes music and lots of "dancing" while in the water! While involved in these outings, Lori describes and explains what they are doing. She encourages Wyatt to use gestures and sounds to tell her "what he thinks" about all of the activities. These adult-child play times have become a way for Lori and Wyatt to "talk" to each other while having fun.

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Literacy-Rich Outings

Literacy-Rich Experiences

Infants often get to go along on activities with adults outside the home. They do things like food shopping, visiting relatives, watching older siblings' ball games, eating out, and visiting the library or bookstore. Many of these activities provide infants opportunities to learn symbols, letters, and signs that help develop the earliest "reading" skills.

What is the practice?

This practice involves an infant's exposure to symbols, signs, letters, words, books, and other familiar images. These images are part of what children typically experience out and about in their neighborhoods and communities.

What does the practice look like?

An 8-month-old infant "goes along" to her older sibling's Saturday morning soccer game. The family passes many things along the way. Before seeing the sign with the name of the soccer field, they pass a familiar shopping center, a billboard with a picture of a dog, and a fast food restaurant. Along the way, the parent says, "Look! That's where we go food shopping" or "See the doggy? You have a dog just like that." Labeling and pointing out familiar and regularly experienced objects provides infants the opportunity to make a connection between words and things that they see.



How do you do the practice?

The young children in your care experience many sights and sounds on trips and visits in their neighborhoods and communities. These are great opportunities to help little ones start to associate objects with words. Here are some things you might try when out and about with a child.

- Start with three or four things that the child gets to see on a regular basis. This can be anything that can easily be pointed out and that is especially interesting to a child. It can be a playground, supermarket, a relative's home, or a favorite restaurant. Point out the most obvious features of the familiar object or place and describe it to the child. You could say, "There's grandma's house! Let's go see your grandma!"
- Anytime you and the child are in a familiar place (e.g., supermarket), pick three or four things that the child especially likes and which are easily recognizable to her. For instance, these could be cereal boxes, fruits and vegetables, milk, or bread. Let the child reach for and hold the familiar objects or foods. Describe and label each item for her.
- Find two or three places in the community or neighborhood that the child particularly enjoys. This can be a community pond or park, public library, a bookstore, or playground. Find activities that you can use to engage her in interactions and conversations.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does the child increasingly recognize objects?
- Does the child vocalize or get excited when she sees familiar people, places, and things?
- Does she seem to understand the words you use to describe people, events, and so forth?

Take a look at more literacy-rich outings

See What I See!

Five-month-old Caleb and his mother take the bus to go food shopping, run errands, and grab something for lunch. Caleb's home visitor has explained to his mom the importance of talking to Caleb about all that is going on around him. Therefore, his mom makes it a point to describe the familiar sights on their route. These include his sister's school, the family's church, a playground, billboards, and so much more. Caleb's mother holds him on her lap so that he can see everything as they go by. As they approach any one sight, Mom describes what he is about to see and asks him questions like "Do you see ____?" and "Where is the ____?" Caleb really looks forward to his bus ride and playing the game with his mother.



More Than a Stroll

Marc's caregiver, Gavin, pushes 6-month-old Marc down the street in his stroller to pick some things up at the supermarket. Along the way, they can look at and talk about many things. They look at trees, flowers, animals, people, cars, and so much more. Gavin names and talks about what he and Marc see between home and the store. Whenever Marc sees something that catches his attention, he reaches toward and points at whatever he sees. Gavin knows that if they stop and "talk about" what has excited Marc, the baby will listen to what he is saying to him. The more trips they make to the store, the more Marc recognizes things that are familiar to him.

Super Marketing

Food shopping is one of 16-month-old Luke's favorite things to do with his mother. He does not have much upper-body strength and cannot sit on his own in the shopping cart seat. His interventionist showed his mom how to use her hand bag and her coat to prop him up so he can see what is going on. Mom has a routine for food shopping, and Luke has learned to recognize what they will be seeing and getting next. Luke's mother tells him what they are about to do. "Next we are going to get Luke's favorite food," she says. She then asks him, "Do you want pretzels or cheese crackers?" Mom occasionally asks her son to point to things that he recognizes. She helps him hold items to get a better look before they go into the cart. By the time they are finished shopping, Luke has probably heard the names for 50 different things!



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Literacy-Rich Home Activities

Literacy-Rich Experiences

Infants become interested in reading, writing, and talking through literacy-rich experiences. These can occur in their everyday lives at home and in child care. This practice guide includes ways to fill a home with opportunities to learn the joys of books, stories, conversation, and much more.

What is the practice?

Give children the chance to play with and read books and “talk” to others. Let them join in fingerplays, and play other sound and word games. Doing so provides infants with the building blocks for learning to read, write, and talk. The term for all these kinds of opportunities is literacy-rich experiences.

What does the practice look like?

Imagine an infant sitting on an adult’s lap and reading a book or an infant and parent playing “So Big.” Picture a child in a highchair at the dinner table as she listens to her older siblings talk about school. Think about an infant finger drawing in pudding or yogurt. These are just a few of the kinds of activities that make up literacy-rich home experiences.



How do you do the practice?

This practice is about getting children involved in activities and opportunities that create interests in reading, talking, and writing. These should be things the baby finds fun and interesting. Do not overdo it. A few highly interesting activities are better than doing many uninteresting things.

- Store-bought and homemade picture books, ABC or talking books and photo albums will all create an interest in stories.
- Read to the child as often as he seems interested. Let him take part in reading a well-liked book by encouraging his touching, pointing, showing, and talking.
- Play lap games and fingerplays. Sing nursery rhymes and made-up songs while you play with the child.
- Talk to the child while you are doing routine activities like getting him dressed or making his meals. Involve him in conversations you are having with other people. Ask simple questions like “What do you think about that?” It isn’t important that the child know what is being said. What you want to do is make him part of the activity.
- Allow the child to draw with his fingers using pudding, yogurt, finger paints, and other items. Involve him in your routines like seeing you make a shopping list or write a note or letter.
- Encourage the child to play with ABC toys that make sounds when they are shaken or dropped.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does the child try to communicate using sounds or gestures?
- Does the child show he is looking forward to the “next words” in a story or rhyme?
- Does she show interest in trying to draw with her fingers?

Take a look at more fun home activities

A Bevy of Books

Susan became interested in books and other reading materials shortly after she could reach and hold things with both hands. Susan likes to look at pictures of familiar things. She enjoys having mom or her home visitor read her stories. Susan's mom wants to promote her interest in books and reading. She makes sure that Susan has lots of daily opportunities to play with reading materials. Susan's home visitor has helped Mom find lots of fun types of books and other things to read. They now have board books, cloth books, homemade picture albums, magazines, talking books, and other reading and storytelling materials. They keep them in a plastic bin where they are easy for Susan to reach. Mom watches for times to use Susan's interests when she reads to her or tells her stories. Mom involves her as much as she can in these activities.



Scads of Scribbling

At 11 months old, Landon has become especially interested in watching Amy, his caregiver, when she draws and writes. Amy tries to find all kinds of ways that Landon can be part of these activities. She encourages him to try to "write" on his own. He may only be able to scribble, but Landon likes sitting next to Amy and "writing." Amy lets him use crayons and magic markers while they are both writing a note or making a shopping list. Landon also gets to finger draw with finger paints on the kitchen table. He scribbles with big pieces of chalk on the pavement outside and "writes" in wet sand at the sand table. As Landon is doing any of these things, Amy talks about them, describes them, and asks Landon questions. She always likes to keep him involved in all of these prewriting activities.

Games and Rhymes

Eight-month-old David, who is blind, and 14-month-old Sarah, who cannot hear, still enjoy lap games, nursery rhymes, and fingerplays. Any one of these kinds of activities provides lots and lots of chances to listen to sounds and words. They help the children interact with parents and other people, and learn the basics of back-and-forth conversation. Through these activities the children learn to communicate wants and needs using gestures and sign language. Ali, David's and Sarah's home interventionist, involves the children in many of these play activities. As they play, Ali talks about all that is going on. She uses simple words and phrases and sign language that David and Sarah have learned to understand.

