

Especially for parents of infants! 

Out and About

 *Literacy Learning Experiences*

Parents often take their babies along to activities outside the home. Food shopping. Visiting relatives. Attending an older sibling's ball games. Eating out. Going to the library or book store. These kinds of activities provide opportunities for infants to become familiar with words and letters.

What is the practice?

Find new ways to expose your infant to symbols, signs, letters, words, books, and other familiar things. Seeing different things when you're out and about will help your child learn to recognize familiar things.

What does the practice look like?

A young mother takes her 10-month-old daughter to her older sister's Saturday-morning soccer game. They first pass a familiar shopping center, a billboard with a picture of a dog, and a fast-food restaurant. Finally they see the sign with the name of the soccer field. Along the way, the mother points out each landmark to the baby. "Look! 'Green Town Grocery.' That's where we go food shopping." "See the big doggy? Our dog Jumper is just like that." Labeling and pointing out familiar symbols and signs helps infants learn the connection between words and things that they see.



How do you do the practice?

There are many sights and sounds young children experience in their neighborhood and community. These are opportunities to help infants start matching signs and symbols with words. Here are some activities you might try when away from home with your child:

- Think of three or four things that your child sees often. They can be anything that is easy to recognize and especially interesting to a child. These are often places like a playground, supermarket, a relative's home, a fast-food restaurant. Point out the most obvious features of the familiar object or place. Describe what you see to your child ("There's Grandma's big blue house! Let's go see Grandma!").
- Anytime you and your child are in a familiar place, pick three or four things that your child especially likes. At a supermarket this might be cereal boxes, fruits and vegetables, milk, and eggs. Let your child reach for and hold the familiar objects or foods. Describe and name the items for your child.
- Find two or three community or neighborhood places that your child especially enjoys. This can be anyplace like a duck pond, public library, book store, or playground. Find activities you can do in each of these places to engage your child in interactions with you.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your child recognize signs or symbols more often?
- Does your child vocalize or get excited when she sees familiar people, places, and things?
- Does your child pay attention to the words you use to describe people, events, and so forth?

Take a look at more out-and-about activities

A View from the Bus

Ten-month-old Paco and his mother take the bus to go food shopping, run errands, and get some lunch. On the way, they pass many familiar sights. These include his sister's school, the family's church, a playground, billboards, and much more. Paco's mother holds him on her lap so that he can see everything as they go by. As they get close to each sight, Mom describes what Paco is about to see and asks him questions. "Do you see _____?" and "Where is the _____?" These question-and-answer chats have become a kind of game something like *I Spy*. Paco really looks forward to bus rides and playing the game with his mother.



Stroll and Chat

Alex's father and mother push their 5-month-old son down the street in a stroller on their way to the supermarket. Along the way, there are many things to look at and talk about. They point out interesting trees, flowers, animals, people, cars, and so much more. Mom and Dad name and talk about the things they see between home and the store. Whenever Alex sees something that catches his attention, he reaches out, gestures toward it, and babbles. His parents stop and talk about what got Alex excited. He listens closely to what Dad and Mom are saying to him. The more trips they make to the store, the more Alex notices the things that are interesting to him.

Shop and Learn

Food shopping is one of 16-month-old Luke's favorite things to do with his mother. He cannot sit independently in the shopping cart seat yet. Mom uses her coat to prop him up so he can see what is going on. She knows that Luke has learned to recognize what they will be seeing and putting in the cart. Mom talks to Luke throughout their time in the store. "Next we are going to get Luke's favorite food!" She holds up two kinds of fruit. "Do you want peaches or bananas?" Mom sometimes asks her son to point to things he recognizes. By the time they are finished shopping, Luke has probably heard the names of more than 50 different things!

