

Especially for parents of toddlers! 

Books and Crayons of One's Own

Literacy Learning Experiences

Looking at and reading books is fun. Using crayons and other writing materials is fun. These activities also help toddlers build literacy skills they will use throughout their lives. In this guide you'll find ideas for fun ways to enrich your child's home life with everyday literacy learning.

What is the practice?

You can give your toddler a head start on literacy well before formal schooling begins. Having a supply of books, magazines, catalogs, art materials, and music in the home is great. With these supplies, you can provide a world of ways to have fun while learning.



What does the practice look like?

Parents can arrange their homes in many ways that invite literacy play. For example, you could give your toddler his own supply of crayons, markers, pencils, paints, stamps, and paper. Store them at a small desk or table kept just for his use. Fill a low shelf or box with children's books and magazines. Update these supplies from time to time by adding new items based on your child's growing and changing interests.

How do you do the practice?

It doesn't have to be hard or costly to provide a literacy-rich home for your toddler. Use recycled supplies (catalogs, magazines, newspaper inserts) or buy them cheaply at garage sales, thrift stores, and used-book shops.

- Find materials that match your child's own interests. One toddler might be charmed by bright, sparkly markers. Another might love using a notepad decorated with cartoon characters. Stickers and stamps might inspire still another toddler to decorate paper and "write" or "draw" on it.
- Let your child help choose a special place in the house for his "desk" and materials. It could be just one shelf in a bookcase or one end of a playroom table. Having his own space helps a toddler become more actively engaged in early literacy activities. When you're ready to share a story, he can choose a book from the box or shelf himself.
- Show excitement when your child writes, draws, and looks at books. Ask questions and praise his efforts. Suggest projects to do together. Pair up to write letters to family members, paint pictures for birthday gifts, or read a book while supper cooks.
- Help your toddler try out computer programs designed for his age group. Let him keep game disks in a special drawer or case. You can sit with your child and guide him through the beginning stages of a game. Let him take over little by little as his skills grow.
- Your toddler's literacy play won't look much like grown-up reading, writing, or drawing. He may page through books from back to front or hold them upside down. Much of his drawing may still be scribbling. Don't worry! His eager involvement in the activities builds his interest and paves the way for learning more mature skills.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your child know where to find his literacy play materials and go get them on his own?
- Does your child enjoy looking at books, using art materials, and playing computer games with you?
- Does your child point out similar materials he would like to play with when he sees them?

Take a look at more fun literacy activities

My Special Place

Two-year-old Lee cannot find her toys, especially when they get mixed in with her brothers' things. But she knows that the big box of books next to her bed is just for her. Lee often adds colorful ad pages and toy catalogs that come in the mail to her book box. When she goes to the library with her family, they sometimes stop at the book-sale table. There she can buy old books for only a quarter. Lee often gets to pick a book for her home book box. Sometimes her mom helps Lee go through her box and remove books that no longer interest Lee. They donate the books to charities or pass them on to younger cousins and friends.



Time To Sparkle

Carly, who is 30 months old, loves anything shiny or sparkly. Carly picks a glitter-gel pen set when her mom lets her pick a treat at the dollar store. Back home, Carly goes straight to the TV tray in the corner of her bedroom. The tray has become her special writing desk. She opens her box of writing supplies and finds a piece of fancy note paper her grandma gave her. Carly tries out the new glitter pens on the paper right away. Mom watches Carly use each pen. They talk about the colors she likes best and admire her drawing and "writing."

Reading Within Reach

Eighteen-month-old Andy's ability to move is limited. His parents know Andy loves to be able to do things without their help. Mom and Dad try to make this possible. For example, they hung a book shelf over Andy's bed. When he wakes up before they do, he can amuse himself while he's still in bed. Andy and his parents often look through the children's books in the family's regular bookcase. Andy picks new books to put within easy reach on his "bed shelf." Andy's parents know he likes having books close by because he chooses the books for his room very carefully. They often find him in bed in the mornings, happily looking through his favorites.

