

*Especially for practitioners working with young children!* 

# World of Learning

*Literacy-Rich Experiences*

Spending time in settings that encourage listening, speaking, and paying attention to written words is a huge plus for young children. Such opportunities are at the center of literacy-rich environments for toddlers.

## What is the practice?

Providing toddlers with a literacy-rich environment means giving them many chances throughout the day to interact with books; experiment with writing and drawing materials; look at and talk about letters, signs, and labels; and listen and talk with interested, responsive adults.

## What does the practice look like?

Toddlers playing with alphabet blocks, stamping with alphabet letters, looking at books from an easy-to-reach display, and singing nursery rhymes with friends are the types of experiences you'll see in a literacy-rich classroom. Throughout the day, caregivers talk with the children about what they are doing. They also point out the everyday uses of functional literacy skills like writing lists, reading menus, and asking questions.



## How do you do the practice?

Young children build literacy skills over time by having fun, meaningful experiences that are based on their interests and that build their confidence. Here are some ideas to try with the toddlers in your care:

- Book reading is an important part of literacy development for toddlers. Provide an attractive and frequently changing display of books and magazines in a comfortable area. This helps make book reading an everyday activity children can engage in on their own and with adults.
- Environmental print—in the form of labels, signs, and posters in your classroom—helps toddlers understand that print has practical uses. Directing children's attention to printed matter in their classroom helps them become familiar with the way letters and words look and begin to see patterns in print.
- Spoken language is the keystone of a literacy-rich environment for toddlers. Engage the children in continuous, meaningful, thought-provoking conversations about whatever is going on around them and whatever interests them. Building good speaking and listening skills will be the result.
- Even though toddlers are too young to "write" as adults do, give them plenty of chances to experiment with making marks on all sorts of surfaces. Let toddlers paint, draw, scribble, and play in sand or other tactile materials. Talk with them about what they are doing during these activities. You'll be helping them take the first steps toward developing later writing skills.

## How do you know the practice worked?

- Are children in your care seeking out literacy-related activities when they play?
- Do the children enjoy talking and listening?
- Do they enjoy scribbling?

# Take a look at more learning opportunities

## Words Are Everywhere!

Two-year-old Sela starts out her morning at her home daycare center by putting her coat on a hook labeled with her name and photo. Her teacher greets her cheerfully and asks how she is doing this morning, allowing Sela time to answer. She goes to the kitchen for breakfast, where the drawers and cups are labeled. After she eats, she joins a friend in the book corner—marked by a colorful poster that says “Book Nook”—and looks at a new book her teacher has placed there. Later, she and her classmates play in sand, use cookie cutters in play dough, and paint with water and chalk on the sidewalk. By the time Sela’s mom picks her up, the toddler has had a whole day’s worth of literacy learning experiences.



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## Walks 'n' Words

Charlotte tries every day to give the toddlers in her care a well-rounded literacy experience. Her group enjoys going for walks in the neighborhood, and Charlotte has found lots of opportunities to draw their attention to print, to engage them in meaningful talk, and to comment on the symbols and signs they see. Some children in the group love to point out street signs like *stop* and *yield*. Others notice the signs for the convenience store across the street. Charlotte talks with the children about all of the words in their neighborhood, and how the signs help people know where they are and where they want to go. She knows the children enjoy these walks and conversations, because they often comment on the signs they see and echo the signs' meanings that Charlotte has explained.

## Count Me In!

Carlo, a 26-month-old with motor impairments, participates in the same literacy activities as the other children in his inclusive class. His teacher provides easy access to oversized books, larger writing implements, and clips to hold papers steady for easier drawing. There are alphabet and word puzzles with grip-enhanced pieces so Carlo can hold onto them. He joins the other children in songs, fingerplays, and acting out stories with occasional physical assistance from teachers. One of Carlo's favorite things is the voice recorder that allows him to record his “stories” and then see the result printed out in words. Throughout the day, the teachers talk to Carlo and the other children about what they are doing, what they are feeling, and what’s coming next. This helps them make the connection between words and their meanings.

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