



**General
Education
Leadership
Network**
a MAISA Collaborative

Language and Literacy for Littles and Loved Ones

Literacy starts early. *Did you know you can support your child's future reading and writing before they can even talk?*

Babies come into the world ready to learn. Everything young children learn about communication, language, books, and printed words on their way to formal reading and writing is part of emergent literacy. Find out what you can do to build a strong literacy foundation for your child in the first three years of life.

Families have literacy superpowers. *Do you know the many ways you already support your child's language and emergent literacy?*

It doesn't take flash cards, tablets, or fancy books. There are many ways you support language and emergent literacy in your everyday interactions with your baby or toddler. Whether you know it or not, you have literacy superpowers. Use the Michigan Language and Literacy for Littles and Loved Ones to discover yours, and build more!

Literacy starts early. You can start now!

Use the camera on your phone to scan the QR codes to learn more about each essential practice!

Set the Stage for Love and Learning



Children need to feel safe and loved to learn and reach their full potential in language and literacy. Families can provide safe, caring, and playful environments to help children feel loved and ready to learn by:

- giving children lots of love with cuddles, kisses, and kind words
- creating consistent daily routines for meals, rest, and play
- providing safe physical spaces for children to explore and play with things that interest them most



**Maximize Love,
Manage Stress**

Back-and-forth Conversations with Babies and Toddlers

Beginning at birth, babies can be part of back-and-forth communication with their loved ones. Families support children's language when they turn babies' coos and toddlers' talk into conversations by:

- looking at their baby when they coo
- copying and adding to children's sounds and words
- translating children's actions and sounds into words
- asking questions
- waiting for answers
- keeping the conversation going



Talk, Point, and Sing



Literacy in Your Family Life and Culture

You play the most important role in your child's early learning. No matter where you are, play and talk with your child in your home language(s). Use language to share your family culture with your child—by talking, reading, telling stories, or singing. Daily routines are the place to start:

- Meals
- Bed time
- Going from place to place
- Getting dressed
- Shopping
- What else do you do with your child every day?

The tools you need are already in your home and daily life!



**B3 Essentials Handout:
Language & literacy in
daily routines**

Print is All Around!

Print includes letters, words, and other symbols like road signs. Knowing how print works is an important early step to reading and writing. Families can help children understand print by:

- pointing out printed words, symbols, or specific letters
- reading labels on items at home
- talking about the printed words they see or write in everyday tasks and what the print is used for



**B3 Essentials
Handout: Print is all
around**



Fun with Books & Storytelling



Babies and toddlers who share books and listen to stories with their families have stronger language and literacy later in life. You can help build these skills by:

- reading books with babies and toddlers from birth
- looking at and talking about picture books
- telling stories out loud
- using books as prompts to talk, sing songs, and share memories



[Read and Discuss Stories](#)

Sound Play Every Day

Playing with sounds helps children notice the sounds of language. Then they can recognize and make those sounds later, and eventually connect the sounds with letters. You can:

- use “parentese” with babies (slower, rhythmic, sing-song speech; scan QR code for video)
- repeat sounds children make
- sing songs and share books with rhythm, rhymes, and similar starting sounds
- point out the first sounds of familiar words



[Parenting Counts: Babies learn sounds and words from you](#)



Baby Language is Body Language

Before babies say their first words, they can “talk” with their face, hands, and body, and you can, too! Promote language as you:

- point and use other gestures as you play, talk, and sing with your baby, and encourage babies and toddlers to use their hands, faces, and bodies to communicate
- use “baby signs” in everyday routines like meals and bedtime (scan QR code for video)
- use pointing and “baby signs” with books, stories, and songs
- translate (put into words) children’s body language, gestures, and signs and respond to their messages



[WKAR Infant Signs Collection](#)

So Much More than Scribbles!

Children start to understand that writing is a way to communicate long before they can write letters or words. Children begin to “write” with marks, scribbles, and pictures. Families can support children’s writing by:

- talking about their own writing (lists, emails, thank you notes)
- celebrating and talking about all the different ways children write!
- putting safe and simple writing tools and materials within children’s reach
- providing toys and activities to build hand and finger strength by building, rolling, squishing, and tearing



[Zero To Three's Learn to Write and Draw](#)

Reading and Writing Within their Reach

Babies and toddlers learn best when they have safe and simple materials for reading and writing within their reach. Get creative with things you already have, such as:

- mail, magazines, or catalogs
- sturdy books from your local library
- cookbooks, recipes, or labels on food packages
- notepads or post-its
- washable markers, crayons, or chalk



Low tech is best! Babies and toddlers learn more from printed books and simple writing tools they can grip in their hands than from electronic ones.



[B3 Essentials Handout: Supporting writing Birth to Age 3](#)

It Takes a Village: When & Where to Go for Help

Do you have questions about your child’s language, play, or interactions? Trust that you know your child better than anyone. If you are worried about your child’s development, reach out to the resources that are here to help. Contact Early On (1800EarlyOn.org) or talk with your child’s doctor. Early intervention can help you provide the best support for your child.



[Download the CDC's Free Developmental Milestones Tracker App](#)



<https://www.1800earlyon.org/>

