

How to Create a Literate Home: Young Child and Kindergartner



The "literate home" for this age child only needs a few inexpensive materials, but parent involvement is key. Your young child or kindergartner continues to build her language base (understanding and using language) in preparation for learning to read, so she still benefits from lots of talk with adults that helps her learn new words. Young children and kindergartners are beginning to figure out how the written word works, and they are starting to use reading and writing in their daily lives. At this age, having a wide variety of books and writing materials available is crucial.

What You Need

- **Children's Books**
For young children, nursery rhymes, ABC books, informational books and storybooks are most appropriate. Kindergartners will enjoy longer stories or chapter books, and some will be able to read very easy books by themselves by the end of the year. You can look for bargain children's books at used bookstores and yard sales, or purchase books at great prices through monthly book clubs offered through child care centers or schools.
- **Letters**
Young children and kindergartners learn to identify the letters. In your home, it is important to have a number of types of letters that your child can move around. Alphabet blocks, foam letters for the bathtub, ABC puzzles, magnetic refrigerator letters, ABC cookie cutters, letter stamps and letter stickers are all ideal materials for children this age.
- **Writing Materials**
Thick markers, paint brushes, pencils and crayons are ideal for the youngest writers since they are still developing the small muscles in their hands that help them hold tools. Likewise, large paper is best for young children. Your kindergartner will be able to use standard-sized writing tools and paper. He may also enjoy it if you make a "book" for him to write in by stapling paper together. Having a model of all the letters available for young writers allows them to refer to it if they have trouble remembering letter formations.
- **Reading and Writing Materials for Parents**
When children see the adults around them using reading and writing in their everyday lives, they're more likely to become readers and writers themselves. Simply having a bookshelf full of books, reading the local newspaper, and having a notepad on which you write grocery lists and phone messages shows your child that reading and writing serve valuable everyday purposes.
- **Props for Pretend Play**
Props such as dress-up clothes and play dishes encourage your young child or kindergartner to pretend, and pretend play actually contributes to literacy skills. Make props for pretend play from materials you already have at home. Empty cereal boxes, mom's old necklaces and an old pot and wooden spoon make ideal items for countless make-believe scenarios.
- **CDs**
Books and children's music on CDs are another way for your child to enjoy stories and

music. Most libraries have extensive collections of audio books and children's music CDs to borrow.

- **Videos**

Videos can help your young child or kindergartner learn basic concepts and information. They are also another way to expose your child to quality children's literature. For children this age, concept videos such as ABCs or rhyming are appropriate, while young children and kindergartners will also enjoy watching videos of familiar books.

What You Can Do

- **Organize a bookshelf for your child's collection.** A sturdy bookshelf located in an area accessible to your child is ideal. This way, he can reach books and use them without asking your permission. Having a special place for his books will demonstrate to your child that books are valuable.
- **Set up a writing area for your child.** Having all of her materials in one accessible spot will encourage your young child or kindergartner to write. Having a special writing box or even a writing table or desk will help your child to see writing as an important activity.
- **Talk together about things that interest your child.** Ask genuine questions, ones to which you do not already know the answer. Ask questions that help children think about *why* and *how* and not just *what*. When you talk, be sure to listen to your child's response and build upon what he has to say.
- **Introduce new vocabulary words when you talk with your child.** When you use a new word, make sure to explain its meaning to your child and encourage your young child or kindergartner to ask when she does not know the meaning of a word.
- **Continue your daily read-aloud routine.** Continue the routine that you established earlier in your child's life. Reading at the same time each day and in the same comfortable place, such as in bed or on the couch, make read-aloud a time to anticipate.
- **Point to the words when you read aloud.** You need not do this for every page but pointing to the words in the book's title, or to the words of a repeated phrase in a picture book, is a good idea. When you point to the words, you show your child that there is a correspondence between spoken and written words and that print goes from left to right.
- **Listen to your child "read."** By the end of kindergarten, most children will be able to "read" some very easy books aloud by relying mostly on the pictures and their memory of the story. Make sure to set aside some of your read-aloud time to listen to your child read as soon as he is ready. Avoid pushing your child to do this until he shows interest, however.
- **Incorporate literacy into outings.** Visit your local library, bookmobile or bookstore to find new read-aloud ideas for your child. Many libraries feature free song and story hours that young children and kindergartners may enjoy.
- **Be a reader and writer yourself.** One of the most effective ways to help children become readers and writers is to show them through your own example that you value literacy and that reading and writing have useful purposes. Make sure that you have a variety of printed and writing materials in your house that you use them on a regular basis, and that you talk to your child about what you are doing when you read and write.