



Supporting Young Learners: **Tips and Activities For Families From Reading Is Fundamental (RIF)**

Here's a collection of tips and activities that you and your children can do together to help make literacy a fun and central part of your family life!

Tips

Provide New Experiences

New places and objects add to your children's vocabulary and can help them understand the stories you read together. You don't have to go far from home to inspire interest and curiosity. Visit the airport if your children are interested in airplanes. Go to a duck pond and point out the baby ducks or the flock of birds flying overhead. Stop at a construction site and watch the trucks. Pointing out details will sharpen your children's observation skills. Reading books, talking, and writing about the things you've seen will help your children connect the stories with their own experiences.

Talk to Your Children

Talking to your children is one of the most important things you can do to prepare them for reading and writing. Your conversations will teach them new words and help them learn to *talk* and *listen* to others. As reading experts will tell you, developing these language skills is the first step to learning how to read and write. Don't oversimplify your language or use "baby talk." Expand your children's phrases and simple ideas into longer, more complex sentences. Ask children open-ended questions that require thoughtful answers, and respond to their answers with additional questions. For example, when at the supermarket, ask your children how you should decide what line to choose at checkout. If they respond by saying that you should choose the shortest line, you can ask your children why people would get into an express lane that was longer than the other lines.





Read and Write Daily

It's never too early-or too late-to begin reading and writing with children. All children, even infants and teens, can benefit from listening to you read aloud. Children who are read to are more likely to be better readers, better listeners, and better students. Write down your child's first words and sentences. Set an example. Let your children see you with a newspaper in hand or curled up on the couch enjoying a book. Make sure your children see you writing, too: put together a grocery list, note a family event on the calendar, or address a card to a family member or friend and mail it. Also, make sure your children have something to write with and something to write on. They can help you make lists, notes, and cards. In this way, children learn quickly that reading and writing are important. And most of all, they learn that reading and writing are fun!

Build Skills With Fun

Have fun with your children-and help them learn-as you run errands, work around the house, and play together. Try rhyming and singing songs with repeating words or choruses. Even younger children can participate in "print spotting" (identifying familiar words and letters on signs, billboards, etc.) as part of riding in the car or on the bus. Ask older children to look for words that use particular spelling patterns (e.g., -tion or -ing words). Expand reading for fun beyond books. All kinds of media-cereal boxes, restaurant menus, and more-provide children with valuable literacy experiences and provide you with opportunities to reinforce reading skills.



Create a Home Library

Encourage your children to spend their free time reading by making a wide variety of books and other reading materials available in your home. Help your children choose books that will captivate their attention and you will help them discover the joy of reading. The more they *like* to read, the more they will read.



Activities

These activities can spark your imagination about ways to incorporate literacy and language into family life. You can use a variety of activities with your younger children as well as your older, school-age children. We hope these activities are just the starting point for fun family time.

Go for a Walk

Plan to take a walk with your children. Before leaving, list some things for your children to look for during the walk, such as squirrels, fire hydrants, blue things, trucks, signs, and pigeons. Your children may also have some ideas; list these as well. During the walk, point out these objects to your children or let your children look for objects on the list and point them out to you.

When your children seem interested in something, stop long enough for them to observe or explore. After your walk, talk with your children about the outing. Look at the list and cross off the objects that you saw together. Invite your children to draw a picture of the objects from the walk; encourage them to tell you a story about the picture.

Collect Family Memories, Share Stories

With your children, look through drawers or storage boxes. Collect objects that bring back memories. Or, as in the book *Song and Dance Man* (Ackerman, 1988) let your kids hunt through the attic with a grandparent.

Start a memory box. Fill it with things that hold special meaning for you and your children, such as:

- ⇒ Toys you played with as a child.
- ⇒ Grandma's locket.
- ⇒ Family letters.
- ⇒ A favorite picture book.
- ⇒ Buttons from an old dress.

From time to time, take out the memory box. Let each child pick out something and tell the family a story about it.





Sing a Book

Find a few picture books that illustrate the words of a familiar song, such as *Over the Meadow and Through the Woods*, *Ten Bears in a Bed*, *Hushabye*, *There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly*, and *The Wheels on the Bus*. You might find these books at the library, or make your own books by drawing pictures or cutting pictures from magazines and gluing them on paper.

Sing the book to your children while they look at the pictures. Or choose books with rhymes or repetitive phrases so your children can chime in. You can vary the activity by pointing to the words as you sing them aloud so your children can make the connection between the spoken and written word.

Get Caught Reading and Writing!

Catch your children reading or writing and take their pictures. Post the photos on the refrigerator, put them in a special photo album, or make a homemade book with them.

Give your children a chance to catch-and take pictures of-you reading and writing too! Modeling is a very important part of creating an environment for reading.

Read Aloud With Your Reader

As your children are learning to read, you can share the task of reading aloud with them! Choose familiar books and alternate pages or have your children chime in with words or repeated phrases they know. Here are a few ideas for making read-aloud time a fun time for all:

- ⇒ Have a puppet "read aloud." The puppet can also turn the pages.
- ⇒ Enlarge the audience with your children's favorite dolls and stuffed animals.
- ⇒ Use a voice recording app to record a few of your family's read-aloud sessions. Beginning readers can listen to these recordings again and again as they follow along in the book.
- ⇒ Encourage your children to value their books. Provide a shelf, shoebox, basket, or carton with their name on it for safekeeping. Help them make homemade bookplates to paste inside books to identify the owners.





Scrapbooks

Making scrapbooks helps children recall what they've seen on an outing or family trip. Include maps, sightseeing brochures, menus, postcards, ticket stubs, photos, newspaper clippings from other cities, and other small souvenirs that can be mounted in pages and kept in ring binders.

You and your children can write in memories and captions as you assemble the pages together.

Joke Book

Together with your children, make your own joke book. Have your children collect jokes and riddles from your family members and friends. Illustrate some of your jokes with funny pictures or photographs that capture silly memories.

Mark the Calendar

Make a monthly calendar and hang it on the refrigerator. Mark the calendar with family things to remember, such as:

- ⇒ Birthdays and holidays (suggest that your children create greeting cards for special occasions).
- ⇒ Health appointments.
- ⇒ Play dates with friends.
- ⇒ Holidays.
- ⇒ Times you have volunteered to help out at school.

Lunch Notes

Slip notes or poems into your children's lunch boxes or bags. Personalized messages always get read right away. Use these notes as a way to check in with your children again at the end of the day. Ask what were they doing or who they were with when they read the note.

