

All about early literacy



When we talk about early literacy, we're talking about what children learn about reading and writing *before* they can fully read and write. Before starting school, your child begins to build their first literacy skills that are essential for their success in school and beyond. In the early grades (Kindergarten to Grade 3), your child will continue to develop these skills and become readers and writers. You can support this development at home and help reinforce their learning at school.

This brief guide will provide you with:

- Helpful tips to build your child's early literacy skills at home;
- An explanation of how teachers will support your child's early literacy in school; and
- Steps you can take if you think your child needs extra support.

Ideas to try at home:

- **Talk to your child** – right from birth, have conversations and ask them questions.
- **Read to your child** – bedtime stories count!
- **Have books and audiobooks in your home** – the public library is a great resource for free books and audiobooks.
- **Ask your child questions about the books they are reading or listening to** – this builds their understanding.
- **Encourage your child to tell you stories** – spoken language is the start of learning to read and write.
- **Play together** – play is how kids explore new ideas and learn. Find ideas and activities in the [Let's Play: Activities for Families, Play Today](#), and [When I Go to Kindergarten](#) guides.
- **Have letter and number toys and games at home** – puzzles, magnets, and board games are fun ways to expose kids to letters, words, and numbers.
- **Play with rhymes** – rhyming books and games help kids learn the sounds of language.
- **Sing together** – songs are a fun way to learn language.
- **Have your child draw, craft, or play with playdough** – before your child can form letters, their hands need to be strong and these activities can help!
- **Point out words in their environment** – on signs, packages, clothing, or toys.
- **Label items at home** – the more words kids see, the stronger their vocabulary becomes.
- **Share new words** – it's not just big--it's also huge, giant, or massive!
- **Attend a class** – Find a [StrongStart](#) near you or check out your local community center or [public library](#) for free early learning activities.

How can I help my child develop early literacy skills at home?

Talking and storytelling are where literacy skills begin. Ask your child questions and share stories with them, including personal stories and stories in your preferred language. Reading with your child every day is also one of the best ways to help them build their early literacy skills. Remember, all reading is valuable—whether it's reading a recipe while you cook together or reading the game cards from a board game. When it's time for your child to read on their own, choose books that interest them as well as some early reader books that they can start to try to read with your help. Teachers may send home books for this purpose. Make sure to ask your child questions about the story, invite them to make guesses about what might happen next, and discuss any new words they come across.

Encourage your child to draw and write regularly. This can include making lists, writing letters, or keeping a journal. Where possible, provide them with fun writing materials like colorful pens, paper, and notebooks. Provide time for your child to express their ideas freely through drawing and writing. Making marks and shapes on paper is the start of writing. Later you can help them practice forming letters correctly.

If you have questions about your child's literacy skills, you can ask your child's teacher or care provider. They can work with you to support your child at home and in school or care.

What can I do to support my child if English or French is not their first language?

You can support your child's early literacy and reading development by reading in both languages. Continue to speak to your child in your preferred language. This will build their ability to speak multiple languages and connect them to their family and cultural backgrounds. If possible, encourage storytelling, play word games, label items, and sing songs in all languages to make learning fun and meaningful.

Early Literacy Resources for Families:

- Your [public library](#) may offer early literacy programs, including story times for you and your child.
- You can also use the [public library](#) to borrow books and sometimes games, toys, and other literacy resources for your whole family.
- Your whole family can build their literacy skills with a free family literacy program through the [Community Adult Literacy Program \(CALP\)](#).
- If you have a baby or toddler, there are many services you can use to [check and support their development](#).
- You may have a free [StrongStart BC](#) program run through your public school to attend with your child.
- You can also visit your local [Child Care Resource and Referral's](#) lending library to borrow free books, toys, games, and literacy kits.
- If your child is school-aged, their school is already monitoring their early literacy development.
- Your child's teacher may also be using the [Learning in the Primary Years](#) to support your child's learning.
- Your child's child care provider or primary teacher may be guiding their learning using the Early Learning Framework. Learn more in the [Early Learning Framework A Guide for Families](#).



How can I build my literacy skills if English isn't my first language?

As a parent or caregiver, there are many free ways to improve your literacy skills.

School districts offer adult education courses for free for adult students. Many [public colleges and universities](#) also offer free adult education and English Language Learning programs. Contact your local college, university, or [school district](#) to learn more about eligibility, available courses, and start dates.

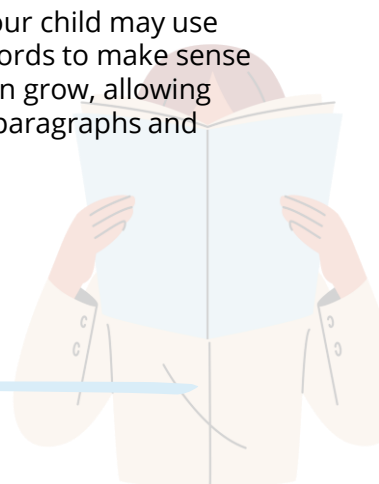
The Community Adult Literacy Program (CALP) offers free adult, family, and Indigenous literacy classes and programs across British Columbia. The adult classes are designed for you, while the family literacy classes improve the reading and writing skills of the whole family. These programs can help you support your child's learning while also improving your own literacy and numeracy skills. [Contact the program](#) closest to you for more information.



What early literacy skills might I notice my child developing?

From infants to primary school students, you may start to notice some wonderful early literacy skills developing in your child. Here are a few you might notice:

- **Interest in Books:** Your child may begin grabbing books and bringing them to you, showing an interest in reading together. They might even start to tell their own stories based on the pictures, demonstrating their understanding of how stories work.
- **Vocabulary:** As they learn to speak more, their vocabulary will grow. The more words they know, the better they will be able to understand now what they will read later.
- **Storytelling:** As their imagination grows, your child may enjoy telling their own stories, which is a great foundation for writing, later on.
- **Letter and Number Recognition:** You may notice your child pointing out letters and numbers in their environment, such as on signs, packages, and toys.
- **Letter Sounds:** Your child may become curious about letters and the sounds they make. They may start recognizing that different letters make different sounds, which is an important skill for reading.
- **Written Words:** Your child may start to recognize parts of words, helping them sound out new words. They might also begin to recognize whole words they see frequently, building their confidence.
- **Sentences:** Over time, your child may use their understanding of words to make sense of sentences. This skill can grow, allowing them to understand full paragraphs and eventually entire books.



How will my child's teacher support their early literacy development in school?

If your child is in school, their teachers will use a variety of strategies to support early literacy development. They will teach your child the basics, like the alphabet, sight words, and how letters and sounds work together (known as phonics), so they can sound out words, spell, recognize, and understand what they see (and later) read. Teachers will also help grow a love of language by reading aloud to your child and asking questions to help your child increase their understanding (or comprehension skills). The classroom will have many books for your child to explore – on their own, with peers, and with their teacher. Your child's teacher will provide opportunities for your child to tell stories and to write in the classroom, helping them learn to form shapes, letters, and later write, as well as express themselves clearly and creatively.

Teachers regularly assess your child's early literacy with different tools to understand how they are progressing in their learning. They can then work with your child to build any skills that may need further support.

What should I do if my child needs extra support in school?

If you or your child's teacher have concerns about your child's reading or writing, the first step is to work together. Your child's teacher may reach out to you if they notice a concern at school, and you can talk to your child's teacher if you notice any concerns at home. Together, you can develop a plan to support your child. You can be part of your child's learning every step of the way.

Your child's teacher will assess all children in their class, including your child. They will use this information to identify any areas your child may need extra support with. They may try new strategies in the classroom to help build your child's skills.

If the classroom teacher feels they need more information, they may talk to you and then ask the inclusive education teacher for help. The inclusive education teacher may also assess your child and may suggest strategies for use in the classroom or decide to work with your child one-on-one or in a small group to support their learning.

If more information is still needed, the inclusive education teacher might talk to you and then refer your child to the school psychologist to gather more information. The school psychologist can give your child's teacher(s) strategies to try at school and can also give you ideas, tools, and games to support your child at home.



Watching your child's early literacy skills develop can seem magical, but it really begins with home, child care, and/or school working together. When your child receives a blend of support and encouragement while their early literacy develops, it can foster a love for reading and writing that can last a lifetime.