

## Parent Education Activities

Parent education sessions need to be planned and should follow a similar sequence each time. The suggested sequence is listed here and is explained later in this article. Also, see *Sample Parent Education Lessons* beginning on page III–17 for examples.

- Engaging parents in a short, motivating, introductory activity
- Presenting new information
- Processing the information through activities
- Helping parents apply the new information

Topics may vary, but the majority of the sessions should center on the language and literacy development of children. It takes careful planning to provide opportunities for parents to learn about their child’s language and literacy development, as well as opportunities for parents to discuss and gain the skills to support this development. Often, parent education sessions provide the opportunity to dispel common misconceptions regarding children’s language and literacy development.

Discussing strategies or activities with parents that support their child’s learning is a fundamental goal of parent education. These activities should be appropriate for the age of the child and can be done in the parent’s native language. Figure III–3 provides some tips from the Reading Rockets Web site ([www.readingrockets.org](http://www.readingrockets.org)) to share with parents.

### **Figure III–3: Parent Tips for Developing Language and Literacy in Children**

#### **Infants:**

- Talk and sing to your baby when you change his diaper, give him a bath, feed him lunch, or join him in play.
- Help increase your baby’s vocabulary by asking “What’s that?” or “Where’s the dog?” when looking at and enjoying books together.

#### **Toddlers:**

- Read stories before bedtime. It makes a good transition between active play and rest time.
- Take short trips to new places and talk about what is happening around you.

#### **Preschoolers:**

- Encourage preschool children to carry out steps to written recipes or to look at labels.
- Play picture-card games with your child.
- Point out words on signs.

#### **Primary grade children:**

- Continue to read with your child even if he has already learned to read.
- Visit the library on a regular basis.
- Show children that you read books and magazines for information and enjoyment.

(Adapted from National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1997.)

*The Learning to Read and Write Overview* below (adapted from Neuman, Copple & Bredekamp, 2000) is a broad look at children's language and literacy development from birth to approximately age eight, including children with special needs, children from diverse cultures and English language learners. Teachers may encourage parents to consider and discuss ways to incorporate the following aspects of literacy development into their family routines:

***The Power and Pleasure of Literacy.*** Children's success with language and literacy requires opportunities to enjoy and value the power that comes with literacy. A critical feature that supports this enjoyment is meaningful interactions with adults through positive literacy experiences. When children see parents reading for pleasure, children see reading as a positive activity.

***The Literate Environment.*** A literate environment provides opportunities to broaden social knowledge and language development. It includes use of print in purposeful ways, language-rich experiences with others, a variety and abundance of literacy materials, and representations of varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

***Language Development.*** Language development involves understanding the role of language skills and word knowledge in meaningful contexts. It is important that children experience a large quantity of discourse and a variety of language. How language is used in home and educational settings influences children's literacy learning.

***Building Knowledge and Comprehension.*** Through enriching experiences with their families and in educational settings, children build knowledge that allows them to assimilate new learning and refine knowledge and concepts.

***Phonological Awareness.*** In infancy, children begin to attend to the sounds of speech. Gradually children become more aware of the sounds around them that eventually lead to making connections between sounds and letters.

***Letters and Words.*** To become proficient readers, children learn that letters of the alphabet form patterns to become words. In becoming skilled readers, they are able to use their beginning knowledge of letters and words to increase word recognition and support their efforts to read and write.

***Types of Text.*** When children become familiar with, experience, and distinguish different types of text (such as stories, conversations, poetry, dramatization, and messages) they are able to read and create these forms themselves.

***Knowledge of Print.*** Children develop knowledge of print when they observe and interact with others as they read, write, and use print for many purposes. In addition, children's awareness of letters, the general shape and length of familiar words, the mechanics of reading and writing, and features of text increase their knowledge of print and how it works.

## Planning Parent Education Sessions

In some family literacy programs, parents attend regularly scheduled group sessions facilitated by a parent educator. In other programs, staff members may alternatively lead parent education sessions. Thus, it is important that all staff members be sensitized to the various cultural aspects of the families enrolled.

Parent education sessions involve various planning steps, beginning with the identification of a topic about which parents want to learn. Some examples might be learning how children’s cognitive abilities develop and grow, learning how to read a book with your child, or even learning how to help a school-age child with homework. Figure III–4 displays a typical parent education lesson format.

### **Figure III–4: Parent Education Lesson Format**

1. Engaging parents in a short motivating introductory activity
2. Presenting new information using a video, an article, a guest speaker, or a children’s book
3. Processing the information through activities such as a discussion, writing on the topic, role-playing, or playing a game
4. Helping parents apply the new information in their own lives

## Typical Parent Education Lesson

The following is an example of a typical parent education lesson. This example is based on a program that serves parents and their young children. The teacher knows the parents can read the books she has chosen. For parents who have very low English literacy skills, the activity could be adapted by encouraging the parents to tell a story, by using picture books, or by providing books in the parent’s native language.

1. **Engaging parents in a short motivating introductory activity.** “Today we will discuss storytelling. How many of you have told a story to your child? Storytelling is one of the most enjoyable activities you can do with your child. Storytelling will promote language development by giving your child various opportunities to use and listen to language. Take a few moments to remember your favorite storytelling experience. Would anyone like to share their story?” (The teacher may want to model by telling a favorite story.)
2. **Presenting new information using a video, an article, a guest speaker, or a children’s book.** “Now that we have shared a few stories, let’s look at several examples of children’s storytelling books. Please choose one. Now, take a few moments and look through the book.” (Allow time for parents to ask questions about their book choice. This is very important when working with parents who have limited English language skills.) Distribute the handout, “Checklist for Reading Aloud to Infants and Toddlers.” (See Figure III–5.) Discuss each aspect of the handout with parents to make sure they understand what is expected.

3. **Processing the information through activities such as discussions, writing on the topic, role-playing, or playing a game.** Model how to read a book to a child, while parents look at their handouts and check off each bullet. Ask parents to find a partner and have them take turns practicing reading or telling their book to each other.
4. **Helping parents apply the new information in their own lives.** Have parents check out their chosen book to read to their child (or discuss) at home. Ask them to notice what part of the reading/storytelling activity goes well and which part of the activity they need to improve. During the next parent education session, ask parents questions about their experiences before, during, and after reading the story. Encourage group discussion.

**Figure III–5: Checklist for Reading Aloud to Infants and Toddlers**

**Before Reading the Story**

- Make sure everyone is comfortable and can see the book
- Read the title aloud
- Show children the cover of the book and talk about it

**While Reading the Story**

- Make eye contact with children
- Vary your voice to fit the characters and plot
- Read one-to-one (or for toddlers, in very small groups)
- Stop sometimes to:
  - Show the pictures
  - Share your own reactions to the story and characters through voice or gestures
  - Encourage children’s reactions to the story
- Encourage children to participate by:
  - Inviting toddlers to join in with rhymes, sounds, and repeated words or phrases
  - Imitating the children’s vocalizations and/or actions during the story
- Understand and change plans when children get tired or seem uninterested

**After Reading the Story**

- Give children opportunities to:
  - Explore the book and/or props
  - Talk about the story (toddlers)
- Reread the book often with the children

(National Center for Family Literacy, 2002, p. 63.)

### Getting Started

Program teachers provide the structure for parent education sessions. However, the topics will be determined by parent interests and program goals. The staff may wish to brainstorm and create an outline for the first parent session, including surveying parents to identify their interests and concerns. (See the example on page III–4.) The first couple of parent education sessions are the best time to include activities that will help parents and staff members get acquainted. The third session might include setting goals and discussing guidelines for future parent education sessions.

### Planning Literacy Development Activities

Figure III–6 provides a sample of possible parent education session topics and suggested activities incorporating research-based information on children’s language and literacy development. The first column provides research excerpts describing the concept addressed. The second column provides suggested parent education topics, and the third column provides suggested activities that parents can practice during parent education sessions and then practice with their child at home. A guide (in parentheses) following each topic and activity indicates the age of children for whom the topic is most appropriate. *All* indicates children age 3 through children in the third grade, 3-5 indicates children in preschool, and K-3 indicates children in grades K-3.

**Figure III–6: Learning to Read and Write Instructional Topics and Activities**

Learning to Read and Write Overview	Parent Education Topics	Suggested Activities
<p><b><i>The Power and Pleasure of Literacy</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a strong correlation between children being read to by their mother and the children’s interest in books (DeBaryshe, 1995).</li> <li>• Many researchers suggest enthusiasm about literacy activities as a route to development of the child’s active engagement in literacy tasks (Snow &amp; Tabors, 1996).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading and telling stories with children (All)</li> <li>• Having fun with language (All)</li> <li>• Creating enjoyable times to read and write with children (3-5, K-3)</li> <li>• Discovering the benefits of reading and writing in everyday activities (3-5, K-3)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Model book reading for parents (All)</li> <li>• Share rhyming games in English and the home language (3-5, K-3)</li> <li>• Illustrate a favorite family story (3-5, K-3)</li> <li>• Model reading and writing family recipes (K-3)</li> </ul>

<p><b>Learning to Read and Write Overview</b></p>	<p><b>Parent Education Topics</b></p>	<p><b>Suggested Activities</b></p>
<p><b><i>The Literate Environment</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Print-rich environments—which include the presence of such items as magnetic refrigerator letters, posters, writing materials, newspapers and books in the home, have been linked to children’s language acquisition or an awareness of print (Goodman, 1986).</li> <li>• Attention to children’s language and literacy environment during the preschool years constitutes a crucial prevention effort for young children at risk (Snow, Burns, &amp; Griffin, 1998).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finding a variety of literacy materials for the home (All)</li> <li>• Creating a literacy-rich home environment (All)</li> <li>• Promoting home culture and language (All)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss a variety of ways to create a print-rich environment in the home (All)</li> <li>• Provide parents opportunities to work with a variety of literacy materials such as menus, bus schedules, and ads (All)</li> <li>• Share literacy materials from parents’ native country or in their native language (All)</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Language Development</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Optimal oral language development occurs when children have numerous opportunities to use language in interactions with adults and each other (Neuman, Coppel, &amp; Bredekamp 2000).</li> <li>• The amount of language children hear and interact with during the formative infant, toddler, and preschool years has a significant impact on the quality of their language skills (Hart &amp; Risley, 1995).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having extended, meaningful conversations with children (All)</li> <li>• Incorporating meaningful conversations into everyday activities (All)</li> <li>• Encouraging children to use words to talk about wants and needs (3-5, K-3)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss the features of extended conversation and the benefits of extended conversations at home (3-5, K-3)</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for parents to role play various interactions (3-5, K-3)</li> <li>• Share ideas about how to encourage children to talk about their day (All)</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Building Knowledge and Comprehension</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through conversations about books, adults may induce higher-level thinking by moving experiences in stories from what children may see in front of them to what they can imagine (Snow, 1991).</li> <li>• Talk that surrounds reading helps children bridge ideas and information from the book to their own lives (Dickinson &amp; Smith, 1994).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having “book talks” with children (All)</li> <li>• Planning learning experiences, and following up on family outings to build children’s background knowledge (All)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take turns reading aloud during parent education sessions (3-5, K-3)</li> <li>• Take turns telling a story; reflect on different stories and storytelling styles (3-5, K-3)</li> <li>• Plan a family experience after reading a book on the topic (All)</li> </ul>

<b>Learning to Read and Write Overview</b>	<b>Parent Education Topics</b>	<b>Suggested Activities</b>
<p><b><i>Phonological Awareness</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phonemic awareness instruction helps children of all ages (National Reading Panel, 2000).</li> <li>• Few children develop phonemic awareness naturally. When teachers plan activities and interact with children to draw attention to phonemes, children’s awareness develops (Neuman, Copple, &amp; Bredekamp, 2000; Snow, Burns, &amp; Griffin, 1998).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using rhymes, songs and chants with children in English and the home language (3-5, K-3)</li> <li>• Using books in English to promote phonological awareness (3-5, K-3)</li> <li>• Helping children write words based only on sounds (K-3)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate rhyming songs in English for parents; ask them to share rhyming songs in their home language (3-5, K-3)</li> <li>• Record parents singing a favorite song in their native language and provide copies for them to share (3-5, K-3)</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Letters and Words</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Letter and word knowledge is a precursor to a child becoming a productive reader (Snow, Burns, &amp; Griffin, 1998).</li> <li>• Teachers can facilitate children’s alphabetic learning through practice in recognizing, naming, and producing letters of the alphabet (Neuman, 2001).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Playing and experimenting with letters and their sounds (3-5)</li> <li>• Making letters with a variety of household materials (3-5)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share ideas on how to use items in the home—alphabet soup or pasta, cereals, and cartons— to teach letters. (3-5)</li> <li>• Demonstrate the concept of letter walls and labeling (K-3)</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Types of Text</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When adults read to children regularly, children learn to distinguish the language used in books from conversational language (Neuman, Copple, &amp; Bredekamp, 2000).</li> <li>• Children need to have access to an abundance of high-quality books and magazines on a daily basis (Burns, Griffin, &amp; Snow, 1999).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploring different genres and how to read them with children (3-5, K-3)</li> <li>• Selecting a variety of children’s reading material (All)</li> <li>• Exploring the different forms and functions of print (3-5, K-3)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss different types of texts with parents</li> <li>• Provide parents the opportunity to interact with a variety of texts</li> <li>• Discuss the process of choosing appropriate books (All)</li> </ul>

Learning to Read and Write Overview	Parent Time Topics	Suggested Activities
<p><b><i>Knowledge of Print</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literacy experiences in the home are related to a child’s understanding of the functions of print and later acquisition of literacy (Britto &amp; Brooks-Gunn, 2001).</li> <li>• Children learn a lot about reading from the labels, signs, and other kinds of print they see around them (McGee, Lomax, &amp; Head, 1988).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploring the many purposes for reading (K-3, 3-5)</li> <li>• Learning about the concepts of print (K-3, 3-5)</li> <li>• Helping children engage in meaningful reading and writing experiences (K-3, 3-5)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate the uses of print by creating a reading log. (K-3)</li> <li>• Gather samples of print in the environment and create a scrapbook using these materials. (K-3, 3-5)</li> </ul>

**Conclusion**

Parent education sessions in family literacy programs are a powerful educational opportunity for parents with limited English language and literacy skills. These sessions offer parents a chance to meet and discuss matters of importance to them as new immigrants in this country. Most importantly, parents learn how to support their children’s language and literacy development as they learn to navigate the American school system.