

# Help your child succeed in school

For students in primary grades

Learning to read and write is a developmental process. You can support your child in many different ways.

Become a reading and writing role model at home and nurture your child's literacy skills. Here are some tips to help your child succeed in school:

- read to and with your child every day (at least 10 minutes a day)
- praise your child's attempts
- use what he can do well to help him learn more
- provide a clearly defined workspace and supply your child with the necessary materials to let her practice early reading and writing
- visit the library and bookstore regularly

## Build your child's literacy skills

In kindergarten and grade 1, most children are in the "role play" phase.\* To help your child learn:

- tell nursery rhymes and songs with hand gestures – in English and your first language
- choose books that rhyme or follow a pattern
- hold the book so your child can see the words and pictures
- encourage your child to join in by holding the book and turning pages or reading familiar words
- draw attention to words your child sees during the day – e.g. restaurant, store and road signs, labels on cans and boxes
- show your child how you use writing

- find opportunities to display your child's name
- use letter names instead of letter sounds
- supply magnetic letters for the family to write and read messages
- provide a computer for word processing
- respond positively to your child's early attempts at reading and writing – comment on content, not spelling or letter formation

## Engage in activities with your grade 1-2 child

In grades 1 and 2, most children are in the "experimental" phase.\* To help your child learn:

- talk about characters, setting and plot when reading a story with your child
- talk about the differences between newspapers, magazines and books
- compare events and people in books to your own ideas and experiences
- use a home message board to communicate with different members of the family
- write messages, greeting cards and letters to family members and encourage replies
- look at the title and cover of a book together – ask your child to predict what she thinks the book may be about  
make personalized books by using pictures and mementos chosen by your child, and let him see you record what he says about the pictures – read the book to each other.

## **Early reading and writing prepares your grade 2-3 child for lifelong learning**

In grades 2 and up, most children move into the "early reading" phase.\* To help your child learn, you can engage your child in various reading and writing activities. Here are some reading suggestions:

- Stop while reading to ask, "What do you think is going to happen next?"
- Occasionally ask *why* questions such as, "Why do you think the author put that in the story?"
- Talk about the book she is reading, or the type of writing she did in school that day. Tell her about the reading or writing that is a part of your job.
- Allow time for self-correction when your child is reading. If a mistake makes sense, ignore it.
- Try simple crossword and word search puzzles.

Here are some writing activities:

- Look for opportunities for purposeful writing activities at home e.g. letters to friends and family, grocery lists, telephone messages, to-do lists and vacation plans.
- Start a family diary to record funny sayings, celebrations, weekend activities and other significant events. Include photos, letters, cards, or other mementos. Make reading the journal a part of family time.
- Encourage your child to answer her own questions. For example, ask her to try and spell a new word and then use a dictionary to check.
- If your child asks for help to 'fix' his writing for a publication or a project, check with the teacher to see if students are using an editing

checklist at school and obtain a copy. Work with your child to use this list. The following list may be helpful:

- Read the writing aloud.
- Can I understand this writing? (Mark any places where the meaning isn't clear)
- Can the ideas be placed in a better order?
- Are there details that could be left out?
- Does the writing achieve the purpose for which it was written?
- Have I checked that the punctuation helps to make the meaning clear?
- Have I checked the spelling? (Underline any words that cause concern)
- Make sure your child has access to a dictionary that he can use regularly.
- Provide access to a computer and encourage your child to type letters and stories on it.

\*Phases and activity ideas adapted from *First Steps*.

## **Games help develop reading and writing skills**

Play a game of *Twenty Questions* with your child. Begin by choosing a noun – person, place or thing, and have your child try to guess the word by asking less than 20 questions. The questions have to be answered by *yes* or *no*. This game will help your child learn to ask questions that narrow the possibilities. For example: The word chosen is "sweater"

Question #1: Is it a person? No

Question #2: Is it a place? No

Question #3: Is it a thing? Yes

Question #4: Is it bigger than a car? No

Question #5: Is it bigger than a dog? No

Question #6: Is it bigger than a book?

Yes

Question #7: Is it something you eat? No

Question #8: Is it something you wear?

Yes

Question #9: Do you wear it in hot weather? No

*Geography* is another game that will help build literacy skills. To begin the game, name a place that can be found on the map (e.g. continent, country, city, ocean river). Then, have your child name a place that begins with the letter that the first name ends with. For example, if you say Brampton, then your child can say Niagara Falls. You can say Saskatchewan and then your child can say Nigeria, and so on.

Play *I Spy* with your child. Begin by finding something that you can see and say, "I spy with my little eye something that starts with *c*." Your child, and any other players, should look around the room and ask, "Is it the cup? Is it the crayon? Is it the curtain?"

Games like *Scrabble* and *Boggle* will help your child with spelling and building her vocabulary.

While driving, ask your child to watch for street signs and license plates. Keep an eye out to see who is going to be the first to see a street that starts with *B*? Who is going to find a license plate from Alaska? Or who is going to be the first to see a McDonald's?