

Early Years Library

SERIES INTRODUCTION: LANGUAGE AND EARLY LITERACY

Language and early literacy skills help children understand others and express themselves through reading and writing. Language and early literacy skills can be supported by children's regular engagement in, and enjoyment of, shared reading, mark making, social conversation and language-rich play.

Early childhood education plays an important role in embedding these early literacy skills into children's environments and daily routines. Meaningful and contextualised activities intended to develop literacy skills show children that the written word has significance and keeps them engaged and excited.

Young children develop an understanding that reading and writing are ways to communicate and make meaning. As children progress on their journey towards reading and writing, they begin to identify sounds and letters, write part or all of their name or read simple words. Later, more advanced reading and writing skills allow children to express themselves in interesting ways and to understand and communicate information across subjects in school.

Children may develop these skills in different orders or at a different pace to others. Practitioners can use their knowledge of each child, their setting and the wider community to tailor their practice.

The Early Years Library contains four language and early literacy booklets, each covering a core language and early literacy skill and key practices that can be used to support skill development. The table on the next page presents the four booklets.

If you want to support:	Focus on:
Language and listening	Learning new words
	Using new words in context
	Listening and responding
	Remembering stories
	Answering questions about a story
Phonological awareness	Identifying a word's first and last sounds
	Recognising rhyming sounds by listening
	Producing rhyming sounds and words
	Syllable awareness
	Oral segmenting (from words to sounds)
Print and letter knowledge	Oral blending (from sounds to words)
	Identifying letters of the alphabet
	Identifying lower case and upper case letters
	Understanding that print conveys meaning
Early writing	Understanding print as a system
	Mark making for meaning
	Forming letters
	Writing your name

For more information on the Early Years Library and to download the booklets, visit www.EIF.org.uk/EarlyYearsLibrary

How can I use these booklets?

The booklets can be used very flexibly and for different purposes:

- During new staff induction, to help new staff understand why they focus on certain skills and activities.
- When planning activities for the children based on your understanding of their interests, needs and the curriculum in your setting. Practices and strategies can be adapted to your context, to children's age, and to your daily schedule.
- Throughout the day to get inspiring ideas for extending activities, responding to children and planning in the moment.

As a practitioner, you might find that you are already using many of these strategies and practices. This can give you the confidence that the work you are doing to support the children in your care is underpinned by evidence.

Commonly used strategies

Evidence-based programmes recommend a range of strategies for practitioners. Throughout the Early Years Library, you will notice that some of these strategies are used more frequently to support some skills, while other strategies are used more frequently to support other skills. For instance, visual tools such as posters and printed materials are frequently used to help children identify a word's first and last sounds, while open-ended questions are frequently used to support children use new words in context. Using a range of strategies is most likely to support young children's development. At times, as a practitioner you will also step back and let children experience challenge and joy in their learning without getting involved.

Strategies to support early numeracy skills include:

- Didactic instruction and teacher modelling
- Discussion, questions and answers
- Visual displays, objects and materials
- Books, songs and nursery rhymes
- Games, role-play and child modelling
- Repeating sounds, syllables or words
- Drawing and writing
- Art and creative projects
- Strategy practice and physical learning
- Timetabled routines

Inspiring ideas

To support each of the skills, the Early Years Library offers inspiring ideas based on typical activities in evidence-based programmes. There are a range of activities suitable for individual, small group, and whole group activities. Some of the inspiring ideas are appropriate for in-the-moment interactions with children, while others require more planning. They are meant to inspire your practice, not dictate it. You can use the inspiring ideas to reflect on your practice, discuss ideas with colleagues and plan how to respond to children's interests and needs in relation to your curriculum.





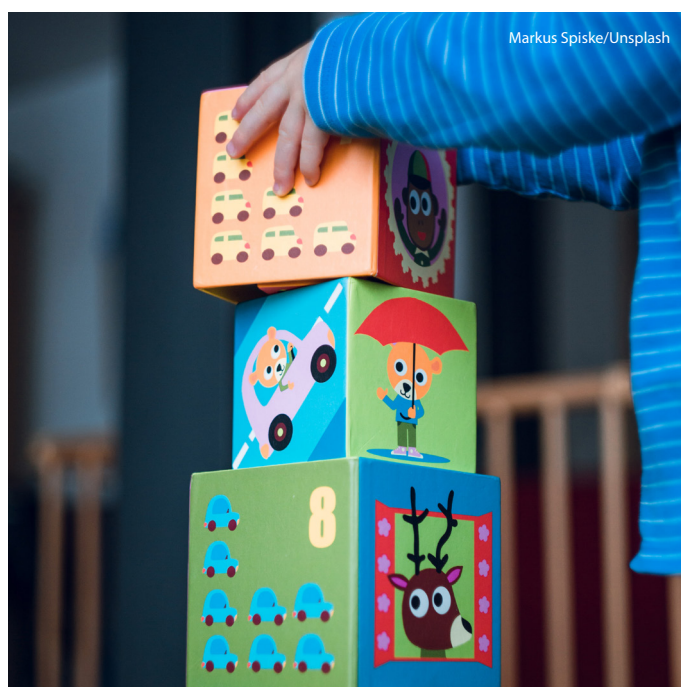
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Unique individuals

Research shows that each child develops in a unique way, rather than following a strictly linear pre-defined route through development in a specific order or timeframe. For this reason, the Early Years Library is not presented in chronological order by age. Practitioners can use their professional judgement to gauge which skills a child may benefit from focusing on at different times.

Inter-connected areas of development

While the booklets are presented separately, research shows that all areas of development are inter-connected. Supporting children's language and early literacy skills will call on social and emotional skills; social and emotional skills will support early numeracy skills, and so on. The Early Years Library is designed to be flexible, allowing you to combine practices from across the booklets and return to the booklets in different ways at different times.



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Role of the adult in supporting child development

Early childhood education can help children build strong foundation skills in language and early literacy skills. When children have plenty of opportunities to explore and practise language and early literacy skills, they can apply the skills they learn to new problems and activities in their everyday life.

Practitioners can support children to develop these skills in a range of ways, for example by establishing routines, introducing strategies and physical learning, or modelling language use. Striking a balance between child-led and adult-guided experiences helps children develop their love of learning while also supporting and extending their learning. The Early Years Library highlights specific effective practices from evidence-based programmes that you can weave into your existing approaches.

Are you using the Early Years Library?

We'd love to hear from you. Scan the code or visit bit.ly/contact-eyl



Early Years Library

READ THE
INTRODUCTION
TO THIS SERIES

Part of the **Language and Early Literacy** Series

LANGUAGE AND LISTENING

**What do we
mean by
language and
listening?**

Developing the ability to listen, understand and respond appropriately and learning and using new and interesting words in context are important foundational skills for the development of language and literacy. Children learn to listen carefully to, understand and remember verbal information and stories. Children demonstrate their listening skills by responding to spoken instructions, answering questions about what has happened in a familiar story or talking about what might happen next. Children hear a wide variety of words in context and are given the opportunities to expand and use new vocabulary in play and conversation.

**Why is it
important**

When children are exposed to, and practise new words in context they develop the confidence and skill to communicate in a variety of ways, and understand the many ways that others communicate, including through reading and writing. Listening and understanding skills also help to develop children's reading fluency, increasing their enjoyment and understanding of books and stories and demonstrating that words can communicate meaning. Being able to understand the parts of a story can give children a foundation on which to develop their own story-telling skills as they grow.

Learning new words

Children learn new words when they are exposed to them in context and can link the word's meaning to their existing knowledge. Starting with simpler descriptive words and expanding to longer, more complex vocabulary, children begin to understand, remember and practise new and interesting words.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Use new words in context, emphasising and repeating them in other contexts to help to build children's understanding
- Talk to children about new and interesting words that you encounter or overhear, explaining their meaning. Encourage children to use the words in activities and their own conversations
- Use visual tools such as picture cards or props that help children to understand the meaning of new words

Inspiring Ideas

- Where does this belong? Using a variety of small world toys, discuss and introduce new words after using familiar words to describe the place each animal lives. Ask children to sort the toys by their habitat. *"Where does the polar bear belong? Oh, it lives in the cold and ice! Polar bears live in a place called the Arctic, that's a snowy habitat! What is a camel's habitat?"*
- Teddy wants to go for a walk round the garden! Support children to plan the walk for Teddy. *"Does Teddy want to walk under the magnolia tree? Jump on the stepping stones? Hide behind the large slide?"*
- Discuss with children the parts of plants found in the garden or grown from seeds using new and interesting words, pointing out the roots and stem, and asking children what plants need to grow. *"Yes! Water and sunshine help plants to grow. Plants need lots of good nutrients from the soil, too."*
To help children to develop an understanding of the meaning of new words, use them again in a different context. *"We need to eat food with lots of nutrients to help us to grow!"*

Tip

Use lots of new and interesting descriptive words in conversations with children. When children hear words used in different contexts, it can help them to build a meaning for each new word.

Tip

To help children generate or recall words, teachers can offer prompts for either the sound of the word (phonological support; e.g. "nu..." to prompt nutrient) or the meaning of the word (semantic support). Allow children the time to remember, rather than just telling them.

Using new words in context

Children learn to use their new vocabulary in the right context with increasing confidence. In structured and unstructured activities, children recall and use new and interesting words to communicate with others independently.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Support children to use new vocabulary by using new words yourself, for example during a role play activity, and extend children's own contributions
- Ask open-ended questions that encourage children to use the new words they have heard
- Use visual tools such as props, dressing-up resources and arts and crafts materials to encourage the use of new words
- Use role play scenarios and games to encourage children to talk to each other using new vocabulary

Inspiring Ideas

- Teddy's visit! Ask children to show Teddy around, describing the important things they can see. When the tour has finished, have the children phone Teddy's daddy and tell him all about Teddy's day! Support children to use and repeat the new words they have heard. *"Teddy got stuck in the oozy mud in the garden and had to be rescued!"*
- After reading a familiar book, support children to role play the story, prompting them to use interesting new words and repeated refrains. *"Do you remember what the troll says? 'WHO'S THAT TRIP-TRAPPING OVER MY BRIDGE?!' That's right!"*
- Shopping mystery! Ask children to describe what they want to buy to the shopkeeper without saying its name! Support children by asking: *"Is it round or square? Does it feel soft or rough?"* Prompt each child to use these new words to help the shopkeeper to figure out what their customer wants to buy.

Tip

Extend children's vocabulary by repeating back what they have said, adding one new descriptive word. *"You're digging a hole? Yes, you're digging a deep hole!"*

Listening and responding

Children practise their listening skills by responding to information that they hear, for instance by listening to spoken instructions or different words or sounds. They respond in different ways, for example, through verbal or physical responses.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Remind children of strategies to help them listen carefully
- Give children developmentally appropriate instructions and ask questions for children to listen and respond to
- Use visual tools such as natural resources and arts and crafts materials during listening and responding activities
- During listening and responding activities, use visual tools and everyday objects such as puppets, toy animals, garden materials (e.g. sticks, leaves, or sand), and flashcards to engage children

Inspiring Ideas

- When playing outside, or on a walk, ask children about the noises they can hear in the environment.
"I think I've just heard a loud, rumbling noise! Can anyone else hear that? What could that noise be? You can hear a whistling sound? Me too! Where is it coming from?"
- Hop little bunnies! When singing 'hop little bunnies' remind children to listen carefully and wait until they hear you sing the word 'hop' before they jump up and start to dance!
- Tic in the dark! Outside on a wintry evening or in a room where furniture can be pushed to one side, turn off the lights or ask one child to close their eyes. Have the other children make funny noises or repeat their own names and have the child who is 'it' find them by sound alone!

Remembering stories

Children remember important parts of stories and put key events from stories in order.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- When reading books with children, show how you recall key events from the story
- Discuss and ask children questions about what has happened within a story
- Using role play and small world play, support children to act out familiar stories in order

Inspiring Ideas

- Let's Talk! Before the story begins, remind children to listen very carefully because at the end you will need help to remember what happened. *"What did the caterpillar eat? Can you remember what animal it turned into at the end?"*
- Pick a familiar fairy tale to read to children. When the story is finished, support children to organise a role play game that re-enacts the story, gently encouraging children to remember key events and repeated refrains. *"So where would you stand? What does the wolf say now? 'LITTLE PIG, LITTLE PIG LET ME COME IN' And what do the pigs reply? 'NOT BY THE HAIRS ON MY CHINNY-CHIN-CHIN!'"*
- After reading a book, spread picture cards which show key events from the story on a table or whiteboard. Ask children to put the cards in order: *"Can you find the first part of the story? And then what happened? You can put that card right at the end if that's how the story finishes."*

Tip

When reading familiar stories, ask children if they can remember what happens in the story just from the cover page.

Answering questions about a story

Children answer questions about a story, for example, making predictions about what might happen next or responding to questions about characters.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Ask children questions and have discussions while reading
- Read stories to children and give your own opinions about the book

Inspiring Ideas

- Let's Talk! *"What was your favourite part of the story? I really liked it when... Has that ever happened to you? How would you feel if you had to do that?"*
- Predict the Plot! In the middle of an exciting, unfamiliar story, ask children what they think might happen next. Encourage children to talk to each other about their predictions. *"Does everyone agree?"*
- When reading a non-fiction book, support children to talk to about something they found interesting. *"Bears eat moths? I didn't know that!"*

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READ THE
INTRODUCTION
TO THIS SERIES

Part of the **Language and Early Literacy** Series

PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

What do we
mean by
phonological
awareness?

Children develop the ability to hear the differences between sounds in language and use these sounds creatively to produce words. Recognising sounds, syllables, and rhymes lays a foundation for children to produce their own rhymes and blend and segment sounds to compose words.

Why is it
important

Phonological awareness is foundational in reading and writing. Teaching children how to recognise sounds and syllables in words and how to orally blend and segment sounds is an early building block for learning how to read.

Identifying a word's first and last sounds

Children begin to distinguish the first sounds in words, recognising when two words share the same first sound, and producing new words that begin with a particular sound. When confident in recognising the first sounds in words, children can learn how to distinguish the last sound.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Demonstrate how to split words up into their first and last sounds and explain how you identify those sounds
- Give children lots of opportunities to talk about words' first sounds
- Use visual tools such as posters and printed materials to reinforce the idea of first and last sounds
- Repeat sounds and split words into their first and last sounds throughout the day

Inspiring Ideas

- Oh no! The animals can only eat food that begins with the same first sound as their name! Help the zookeepers find chocolate for chimps, sausages for snakes and eggs for elephants!
- Support children to make piles of objects beginning with the same sound. Draw the letters on paper to label the piles as they create them: *"You've brought a rrrr-abbit! And you've brought a rrrr-ed crayon! They both start with r!"*
- I spy! Use both the first and last sounds in words in games of I spy: *"I spy with my little eye something beginning with 'ch'... Chair! That's right! I spy with my little eye a colour ending with 'ed'... Red! You got it!"*

Tip

Children find it easier to recognise the first sound in words, start there and progress to words' last sounds.

Recognising rhyming sounds by listening

Children become familiar with the concept of rhyming and learn to identify when sounds and words rhyme by listening to words read aloud in activities, songs, poems and games. Being able to hear when something rhymes is the first step to children becoming more familiar with different groups of words (e.g. words ending in *-ing*) and becoming more confident at telling when words rhyme, and when they don't.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Show children which words rhyme by emphasising and talking about words that rhyme
- Discuss why and when words rhyme, and when they don't, and ask children to identify rhymes
- Repeat sounds, syllables or words to help children become familiar with different rhyming words and sounds
- Use books, poems, songs and nursery rhymes to give children lots of opportunities to listen to rhyming words
- Use games and role play activities to support children to listen to and repeat rhymes

Inspiring Ideas

- Point out the rhyming words in a familiar nursery rhyme, pausing to let children fill in the rhyming word if they can. *"Twinkle twinkle little star, how I wonder what you....are! 'Star' and 'are' sound the same, they rhyme. Up above the world so high, like a diamond in the...sky! That's the rhyme! You are rhyming experts!"*
- Have a mischievous puppet or teddy read a poem or sing a song with rhyming words in it, while children join in. Teddy says a funny, made-up word in the place of a familiar rhyme!
- Fill a bucket with pairs of toys that rhyme like a cake and a snake or a fox and a box. Have the children take turns to pick an object until everyone has something. *"Oh you've picked the clock! And your friend has picked the s....ock! That's right, they rhyme! That means the end of the words sounds the same. Who else can find a pair that rhymes?"*

Tip

Show children that their mouths make the same shape when they are saying words that rhyme.

Tip

As children become more familiar with recognising rhyming sounds by listening, showing them rhyming words in print can further support their learning.

Producing rhyming sounds and words

As children develop skill and confidence in recognising rhymes, activities progress to support children in being able to come up with their own rhyming sounds and phrases.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Discuss and ask children questions about rhyming words and phrases and prompt them to come up with their own rhymes
- Show children how to make up their own rhymes by brainstorming potential rhyming words
- Repeat lots of rhyming sounds, syllables and words throughout activities and discussions
- Use pictures from books and tools in your setting to encourage children to think of rhyming words

Inspiring Ideas

- Your name sounds the same! Support children to swap the first letter or sound of their name to make a funny rhyming name – “*Lily, you look ch-illy!*” – encouraging them to think of lots of rhyming nonsense words once they are more confident.
- Using a story with lots of rhymes, look carefully at the pictures and repeat the last line of the previous page. “*When I’m driving in my car, I look up and see a...’ Can anyone see something on this page that rhymes with car? Yes! A star! Can we think of other words that rhyme with car and star? How about ‘I have to drive very f...’*”
- Rhyme hunt! Hold up a coloured crayon and ask children to run and find something that rhymes with the crayon’s colour, shouting it out when they get there. “*Sink! Wow! That does rhyme with pink! Can anybody find something that rhymes with blue? You found glue!*”

Tip

Making up nonsense rhyming words is a great way for children to learn the rules of rhyming

Tip

Using lots of songs and chants helps children to recognise, repeat and make up new rhymes

Syllable awareness

Children develop an awareness that syllables make up words. They begin to break words into syllables and blend syllables together to form words. Activities involve clapping, blending or segmenting words into syllables.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Show children how to break words up into syllables by demonstrating how you would do it
- Ask children how they might break up words into syllables and prompt them to try it
- Repeat different sounds to reinforce how you might break words into syllables and blend them back together to make words
- Use clapping, drums or other resources to count syllables, reinforcing that words are made up of different parts

Inspiring Ideas

- At the beginning of the day, say hello to children by clapping along with the syllables in their names. Encourage children to join in and try to clap others' names.
- Syllable song! Encourage children to bang on a drum or stamp their feet along to the syllables in their names, interesting words or nursery rhymes.
- Separate children into two groups, giving some children the first syllable of a two syllable animal name and others the second syllable. Ask children to stand next to their partner and support them to blend the syllables together: *"chee...tah...cheetah! Well done!"*

Tip

Compound words like goldfish and rainbow can be easily split up and put back together to help introduce children to the concept of syllables.

Oral segmenting (from words to sounds)

Segmenting involves breaking words down into smaller parts. It is the opposite of blending sounds together to form words. When children are confident in segmenting 'chicken' into the two syllables chi-cken, they can segment the word sound by sound: ch-i-ck-en (for instance, when children are confident in segment 'table' into the two syllables ta-ble, they can segment the word sound by sound: t-a-b-l). Being able to break spoken words up into their separate sounds is an important building block for children's reading and writing.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Show children how you might break up words into their different parts
- Repeat the sounds that word parts make so children become familiar with different word sounds
- Discuss and ask questions about splitting words up into their sounds to provide children with lots of opportunities to practise breaking up words

Inspiring Ideas

- RAINBOW! Show children how you can clap each syllable: RAIN-BOW. As children's awareness develops, you can start with the first syllable, RAIN and clap each sound: r-ai-n. Repeat with the sounds of the second syllable, BOW: b-ow.
- Stand up sounds! Choosing simple words with three sounds, shout out a word and have one child quickly stand up, shout out the first sound, then sit down. Have the other children do the same, shouting out the sounds in order. *"The word is SHIP! 'SH'! 'I'! 'P'! Brilliant job!"*

PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

Oral blending (from sounds to words)

Oral blending (using sounds to create words) is the opposite of oral segmenting (breaking words down into sounds). Being able to blend sounds together to make words is an important building block for children's reading and writing.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Discuss and ask questions about the parts that make up words and how they blend together
- Use books, poems and songs to give children lots of opportunities to hear and practise rhymes and repeated refrains to familiarise them with blending parts of words together
- Have children repeat the sounds of word parts so they become familiar with producing different sounds

Inspiring Ideas

- Simon Says! Make Simon Says a bit trickier by sounding out the words and encouraging children to blend the sounds together before they complete the actions: *"Simon says touch your h-ea-d! Simon says j-um-p!"*
- What am I looking at? Support children to find the item you are carefully sounding out. *"What am I looking at? It's a d-o-g... yes! The DOG!"*

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PRINT AND LETTER KNOWLEDGE

**What do we
mean by print
and letter
knowledge?**

As part of print and letter knowledge, children begin to identify letters of the alphabet, including naming lower and upper case letters. Children also start to understand that words are made up of a group of letters and recognise some familiar words by sight. Print knowledge develops children's awareness of the nature and use of print. Children learn to identify parts of a book, like the front cover, title and author and develop an interest in looking at books independently.

**Why is it
important**

Print and letter knowledge is critical in reading and understanding the meaning of text. By knowing that letters combine to make words and understanding that print is organised in a particular way, children develop an understanding of 'words' and how the system of printed words works. Print and letter knowledge are supported through interactions with adults and other children who point out letters, words other features of print, such as book titles.

Identifying letters of the alphabet

Definition

Children learn to identify and name letters of the alphabet.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Use visual tools such as plastic letters or cut out letters to help children become familiar with the shapes and names of letters
- Discuss and ask questions about the letters of the alphabet during letter games and activities
- Introduce and reinforce the names of letters by saying the letter name out loud while showing the letters in print
- Help children to recognise and name letters by supporting them to trace letters with their fingers and recreate letter shapes in different materials (e.g. sand, foam or paint)

Inspiring Ideas

- Letter Bingo! Hold up letters pulled from a bag and ask children to mark or put a counter down if they have the same letter on their bingo card. First to get a line of letters wins!
- Write a letter on a whiteboard or on a piece of paper in the centre of a table. Children can practise tracing the letter in the air with their finger, or moulding it out of playdough.
- Spread plastic letters or magnetic letters on a table or whiteboard. Describe the shape of a letter and ask children to find it for you. *“Can you find the letter that looks like a snake (S)? Can you find the letter that looks like two hills stuck together (M)?”*

Tip

As children become more confident in recognising different letter shapes, introduce a variety of letters (e.g. letters cut out of magazines, letter blocks, or magnetic letters) so children can recognise letters in different forms.

Identifying lower case and upper case letters

Children learn to identify and understand the difference between lower and upper case letters.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Use visual displays, materials or tools such as plastic letters or cut out letters to help children become familiar with the shapes and names of lower and upper case letters
- Discuss and ask questions about the characteristics of lower and upper case letters during letter games and activities
- Introduce and reinforce the names of lower and upper case letters by naming them when you see them in print
- Help children to recognise lower and upper case letters by supporting them to trace and write with different materials (e.g. flour, sand, or foam)

Inspiring Ideas

- When reading a story, point out the capital letters in the title, comparing them to the same letter written in lower case. *"Does anyone's name begin with 'T', too? Let's write your name out! Can you see that your first letter is an upper case letter?"*
- Memory Game! Can children match an upper case letter to its lower case letter? *"You've found an E and an e! That's a pair!"*
- Sorting Letters! Hold up plastic letters or magnetic letters, say the letter name and ask whether it belongs in the lower or upper case letter pile.

Tip

Discussing the first letter in children's written name can help to reinforce the idea of upper case letters.

Understanding that print conveys meaning

Children begin to understand that print and text convey meaning, and that what we say can be communicated in writing. This includes being able to recognise their name in print and an appreciation that books tell a story using written words.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Read words out to children when you spot them in the classroom, outdoors and in books
- Use visual tools embedded in the environment, such as labels on food cartons or signs, to familiarise children with words and their meaning
- Take time to discuss and point out to children what words look like, what letters they have, and what different words mean

Inspiring Ideas

- Point out words on signs when outside. *"Look at this sign, can you see the hand? There is also a word, can you guess what it says? Yes, it says 'STOP'!"*
- I'm here! Have children 'sign in' each morning by choosing a card with their name on it, arranging magnetic letters on a whiteboard or, for older children, supporting them to write their name in a register.

Understanding print as a system

Children develop an awareness of writing and print as a system. Children learn to recognise that words are read from left to right and top to bottom in English, and that books have different parts for example, the title, author, cover, or 'The End'.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Use visual tools such as posters, magnetic letters and pages of books to help children understand that words are made up of a combination of letters, both lower case and upper case
- Show how to hold and read books, flipping each page from the start of the book to the end and pointing out the direction you're reading and the way you are holding a book when reading a story
- Give children plenty of opportunities to practise holding and 'reading' books themselves
- Discuss and ask children questions about the parts of a book

Inspiring Ideas

- When reading a story, point out the author and illustrator's names and read the title out loud. *"What does the title tell us about the story? Can you guess what the story will be about?"*
- Track words with your finger when reading a story to show children what reading looks like. Point out that you're reading the words from left to right and top to bottom. See if children can move their fingers along the text as you read.
- Awesome Authors! Support children to make their own book, showing them where to add their name as the author, talking about what the front cover tells us about a book, and adding page numbers to their drawing or writing.

Early Years Library



Part of the **Language and Early Literacy** Series

EARLY WRITING

What do we mean by early writing skills?

As children develop, they begin to give meaning to the marks they make. Young children use fingers and tools to make marks on different materials such as paper, in sand and in paint. As children develop in skill and confidence, they learn to copy, trace and recreate letters of the alphabet using their fingers and writing materials like crayons and pencils. These activities help children to understand they can communicate through writing, and alongside the physical development of gross motor skills like balance and control, children develop the fine motor skills and control they need to begin their writing journey.

Why is it important

Being able to write allows children to communicate in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes. By having lots of early opportunities to produce letters and words for meaningful reasons (such as making signs or writing a shopping list) children understand that what they write can convey their ideas, thoughts and feelings to others.

Mark making for meaning

Children learn to communicate and develop writing skills through early mark making. By incorporating mark making into their play, children can give meaning to the marks they make, and begin to understand how those marks, letters, numbers, pictures and words communicate meaning to others.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Show children how you use mark making and writing in a variety of ways to communicate with different people about different things
- Support children to draw and mark make to communicate ideas and experiences that are meaningful to them and show the power of communicating through the written word

Inspiring Ideas

- Shopping List! During a role play activity, prompt children to make a list to take to the shops, making marks or drawings to represent their favourite foods or ingredients to bake a cake.
- I'm here! Have children 'sign in' each morning by choosing a card with their name on it, arranging magnetic letters on a whiteboard or supporting them to write their name in a register.
- Perfect Postcards! Support children to draw and write a postcard for someone they love. Write 'Dear' and 'Love' out for children to copy and support them to make other meaningful marks, writing and drawing pictures. When children have finished their postcard, add an address to the envelope, talking about how the numbers and words help the post office to know where to take the letter.

Tip

Creative activities, like art and craft projects, give children opportunities to share their thoughts and experiences in different ways, preparing them to share their ideas through writing.

Tip

When you ask children to write about something, use set topics to help children scaffold their ideas (example topics include farm animals, dinosaurs, modes of transport, favourite foods, seasons, space or nature). Sensitive focus on topics and experiences that all children might have the opportunity to take part in, like park visits rather than holidays or expensive toys.

Forming letters

Children begin to form letters of the alphabet.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Use visual tools that you already have in your setting such as playdough, sand, slime or wooden letters to help children to see and form letters of the alphabet
- Write letters during activities with children, describing and naming the letter, and talking about how you move your hand or hold the tool you're using
- Use lots of different materials to copy and form letters
- Play letter games and activities, reinforcing the names and shapes of the letters

Inspiring Ideas

- When children are mark making in dry sand, show them how you might write the first letter of their name using your finger, a stick or a paint brush. As children become more experienced, introduce different letters and different tools.
- Letter hunt! Gather together pages from magazines and newspapers, choosing a letter that the children can hunt for, cut out and stick onto paper. Once children have shown each other their wonderful pictures, support them to finger paint or write the letters they have found onto a big piece of paper
- Using wooden or plastic letters, or even scrabble tiles in a bag, have each child pull out a selection of letters, supporting them to name and copy the letters onto a piece of paper. Read out all the funny words they have written and ask what they think the words might mean!

Tip

Children might need time to develop control over pens, crayons and paint brushes. Accept scribbles and drawings that can be difficult to interpret, and allow children to tell you about their creations.

EARLY WRITING

Writing your name

Children practise writing their names as a first step in learning how to write whole words.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Support children to draw and write their names using a variety of different writing tools
- Show children how you write the individual letters of their name, pointing out the upper case letter at the start
- Use visual tools that you already have in your setting such as wooden or plastic letters or their names on their pegs to help children to recognise and copy the letters from their name

Inspiring Ideas

- Using wooden or plastic letters, support children to find the letters that make up their name and put them in order, naming the letters as you go. Using brushes, sticks, the wheels of toy cars or pencils, support children to write their names in paint, sand or on paper.
- Ask children to find their name label next to their peg. Show children how you can copy their names onto paper, and support them to do the same. As children become more familiar with the activity, talk about the difference between lower and upper case letters, pointing out that their name has an upper case letter followed by lower case letters.
- Teddy is coming for a visit, but he doesn't know any of his new friends' names! Support children to write their names on stickers to help Teddy get to know everyone.

Tip

Children may find it easier to write their full name using upper case letters. As their writing skills develop, introduce the lower case letters that they will need to use.