



District of Columbia  
Office of the State Superintendent of Education



# Navigating Early Learning

A Parent's Guide



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# I. HIGH QUALITY EARLY LEARNING

A high quality early care and education program has positive effects on a child's cognitive, social and emotional development as it relates to self-confidence, curiosity, and love for learning. All of these factors help prepare a child for school and life.

- National studies estimate that more than 40% of America's new kindergartners are not fully prepared or "ready" for school.
- Kindergarten teachers report that at least half of their children have specific problems with entry into kindergarten, including difficulty in following directions, lack of academic skills, and/or difficulty working independently.
- Because children's readiness to learn is strongly predictive of future academic performance, children who enter kindergarten behind their peers are unlikely to ever catch up. Therefore, implementing a high quality early learning program is a key strategy for closing the achievement gap.

## Why is high quality early learning so important?

- It is an excellent return on investment. For every \$1 spent on early learning, society saves \$7 in later costs.
- Research shows that when children are better educated, they are more productive as adults, likely to be healthier, pay more taxes, and are less likely to require welfare and other public assistance.



## II. EARLY LITERACY

*This information is provided by LearnDC.org, a one-stop source of education information for parents, children, teachers, and educators in the District of Columbia.*

Early literacy is what children know about reading and writing before they are taught these skills in school. Singing, talking and reading are important parts of early literacy that can start at birth. Even if your child is a little older, you can start singing, talking and reading to help prepare her for success in school and life.

Explore tips for your child from pregnancy through 5 years of age from Mayor Vincent C. Gray's early literacy campaign, Sing, Talk and Read DC:

### I'm Pregnant



You're having a baby. This is an exciting and stressful time. There is a lot to do to get ready for the birth of your child. You have to make sure the baby has a crib or bassinet and you need to get baby clothes and diapers. In addition to being prepared once your baby is born, there are things you can do now while your child is in the womb.

Did you know your unborn child hears your voice? Singing, talking and reading can help set your child on the early road to success. The songs you sing will become familiar to your child in the womb. Your child will recognize and be comforted by these same songs later in life.

Reading and talking to your unborn baby also provides comfort. Your child becomes familiar with the spoken word and to your voice.

## Birth - 1 Year



From the very beginning, singing, talking and reading are important ways to help set your baby on the road to success in school and life. As a busy parent, the first step is to get a DC Public Library card. Use it to access your local library. Explore other ways to help your baby grow in the first year.

### **Your newborn baby hears sounds more than words.**

Sing to your baby. Choose songs with simple rhythms or melodies. *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star* is a good choice. Sing along with the radio or just make up a song. Sing to him/ her while fixing dinner or folding clothes, giving him/her a bath or combing his/her hair. Sing to your baby every chance you get.

### **The sound of your voice is more important than the words on a page.**

Talk and read to your baby. Share your thoughts with your baby. Read aloud anything that interests you - a magazine article, novel or even make up a story. Talk about what you see.



### **In the first few months, your baby sees mostly in black and white.**

Your baby recognizes black and white images and those with high contrast like bright red on white background. Read and show your baby books with black and white images; bold, bright colors and lots of white space; and books with faces of other babies.

### **Your baby needs to explore and feel different things.**

Read books with different textures for your baby to touch and feel. As he/she starts to reach for objects and puts things in his mouth, select board books that have sturdy pages. Don't be surprised if your baby puts a book in his mouth. Remove the book and give him a rattle while you read aloud.

Be sure to place your baby on his tummy to help build neck and back muscles. Stay close by. This is a perfect time to sing and talk to your baby. You can prop a sturdy book with bright color pictures for him to see. Talk about what's on the pages.

### **Encourage your baby as she begins to make her first sounds.**

Your baby's first sounds are likely burps that grow into "ooh" and "aah" noises and then babbling. Read books that feature sounds like animal and vehicle noises. Check out Sandra's Boynton's *Moo, Baa, La La La!* Say "moo" to your baby when you read about cows and "meow" for the cats in the book. When you talk to your baby, imitate the sounds she makes.

### **Later in his first year, your baby learns the names of things.**

As your baby grows, he begins to learn the names of things and loves to find objects on the pages of books. Pick books that allow you to point and say the names of objects.

### **The number of different words your baby hears is important.**

As your baby gets older and his listening skills grow, help build the number of words she hears by reading books that describe action such as "you can", "we are", "she is". Try *You Can Do It, Too!* by Karen Baiker and Ken Wilson-Max.

### **Your baby has a short attention span.**

All babies have short attention spans. It is less likely your baby will sit quietly for reading, particularly when he starts

to crawl. This is a good time to sing, talk and play. Books with catchy songs, poems and nursery rhymes like *Mary Had A Little Lamb* are good choices. You may like *My Very First Mother Goose*. Limit your book-sharing time to just a few minutes. If your baby becomes fussy, stop and read again later.

### **Bond with your baby through reading.**

Cuddle up with your baby and a book. Create a book-sharing routine by reading to your baby at bedtime or just before or after a nap.

## **1 - 3 Years**



As your baby becomes a toddler, she grows more curious and talkative, and moves around more. This is an important time to sing, talk and read to help set your child on the road to success in school and life. If you don't have one already, now is a good time to get a library card. Use it to access your local library. Explore ways to help your toddler learn and grow.

### **Your toddler develops early language skills.**

As your child begins to speak, choose books that expose her to more words. Point to objects on the pages and have her name them.

Use new and more words when you talk with your child. Say the names of the streets when you drive or the names of stations while riding the Metro.

You'll also notice your toddler loves to say "no." Read books with your child where "no" is the most appropriate answer to questions.

### **Your child's hands and body movements develop.**

Toddlers begin to have more control of their hands and bodies. Your child will pick up and handle objects more often. He will pick up items from the floor, move items from one hand to the other and squeeze and throw things.



Introduce large crayons. Scribble together on a piece of paper. Allow your child to handle books like *Moo Moo Brown Cow* by Jakki Wood and Rog Bonner. Choose small books with cardboard pages that he can handle and carry.

### Encourage your toddler to move around.

At this age, your child will crawl, walk and even run a little. She may move away from you while you read. There is no need to try to force her to sit still; she's still listening. Read books with repeat words or phrases and books that encourage her to move around.

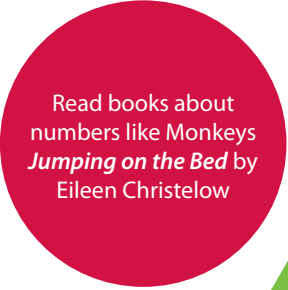
### Your toddler can do things on his own.

Your child starts to do things by himself and is proud when he can do something. Read collections of rhymes with few words on the page and allow your toddler to turn the pages.

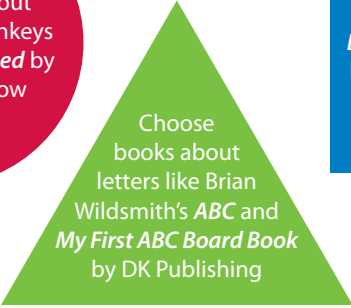
Cardboard books with flaps on the pages, called Flap Books, allow your toddler to lift the flaps while you read.

### Your child learns simple concepts and begins to sort by size and color.

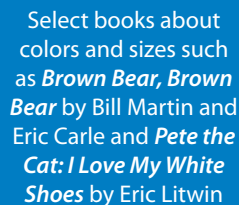
Your toddler can learn simple concepts like numbers, letters or colors. Point out letters or numbers while in the grocery store.



Read books about numbers like *Monkeys Jumping on the Bed* by Eileen Christelow



Choose books about letters like *Brian Wildsmith's ABC* and *My First ABC Board Book* by DK Publishing



Select books about colors and sizes such as *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* by Bill Martin and Eric Carle and *Pete the Cat: I Love My White Shoes* by Eric Litwin

Have fun while your child begins to sort objects. Use socks, blocks, or large crayons. Ask her to pick up all of the big socks or draw with the green crayon. Use items that aren't too small to avoid a choking hazard.

### **Your toddler uses more words.**

As the number of words your child learns increases, it is important to choose books with harder words. Choose simple stories with new words. Alphabet, number, color and naming books are good options for toddlers.

Songs are also a great way to introduce new words. Sing songs you know or read books with children's songs.

### **As your toddler grows, her attention span increases.**

Your child is able to pay attention for longer periods of time. Short, simple stories with real-life situations help him understand that a story has a beginning, middle and end. Make up or tell a family story on the bus ride home.

## **3 - 5 Years**



Your child is a preschooler. As his self-esteem continues to grow, your child is interested in talking and can do a lot more by himself. This is an important time to sing, talk and read to help set your child on the road to success in school and life. If you don't have one already, now is a good time to get a library card. Use it to access your local library. Explore ways to help your preschooler learn and grow.

### **Your child learns and uses more words.**

Point out words you see while you walk together and ask your child to repeat them. While shopping, have him help place items in the shopping cart and tell you what they are. Poetry can increase your child's interest in words. Books with silly, made-up words help your child have fun with reading. Books with repeat words and phrases increase her interest in words.

### **Your preschooler does more on her own.**

Your child is proud when she can accomplish a task. While she helps you pick up her clothes and toys, ask her to tell you the name and color of each item.

Visit the library and let your child choose her own books. Books, including those with no words that allow your child to make up or tell the story, are a great way to show what she can do. Some books allow your child to guess what happens next. This helps her understand the structure of a story.

Songs from the radio or songbooks like *Let it Shine* by Ashley Bryan and *Lady with the Alligator Purse* by Nadine Westcott are good options for your preschooler. She can sing along with the repeat chorus.

### **Your child's self-esteem grows.**

As your child's personality develops, it is important for him to hear and read stories that he can identify with. Share stories about your childhood or special memories about a grandparent. Choose books with human characters who look like your child or animals that act like children.

### **Your preschooler learns harder concepts.**

As your child grows, she learns letters, numbers, colors and opposites. Support learning about letters with books like *Alphabetics* by Suse MacDonald, *LMNO Peas* by Kieth Baker and *Chicka, Chicka, Boom, Boom* by Bill Martin.

Write together with crayons on the Metro or while waiting to see the doctor. Help your child write her name using different



colored crayons. Explore colors through books like *Green* by Laura Vaccaro Seeger.

Choose books with harder content. Books about numbers like *One Foot, Two Feet* by Peter Maloney and books about opposites such as *Dinosaur Roar* by Paul and Henrietta Stickland are good choices.

### **Your child learns through play.**

Pretend play helps your child learn. Have a pretend picnic with your child. Talk with him about the pretend food you are eating and talk with his pretend friends who are at the picnic. Read books that celebrate pretend play like *I Stink!* by Kate McMullan.

### **Your child's knowledge of letters increases even more.**

When reading a book with your child, point out the words in the title and see if he can find them later in the text. Read books where words are repeated often, like *Chicken Little* by Rebecca Emberley. Encourage your child to write the letters.

### **Your preschooler is interested in the world around her.**

As your child gets older, she becomes interested in the world. Talk with her about the butterflies or worms you see outside. Talk about the new homes or buildings being built in your neighborhood. Choose books about science, history, machines or dinosaurs.



## III.CHILD CARE SUBSIDY PROGRAM

Need assistance with childcare? You might be eligible for the Child Care Subsidy Program.

### **What is the Child Care Subsidy Program?**

The Child Care Subsidy Program is designed to assist eligible families with child care cost. The Office of the State Superintendent of Education will pay all or part of your child care costs directly to a child care provider based on your household income.

### **What ages does the program serve?**

Eligible children ages 6 weeks to 13 years are eligible to participate in the program. However, children with disabilities may qualify up to their 19th birthday.

### **How does a parent apply for Child Care Subsidy benefits?**

A parent may apply for Child Care Subsidy benefits by completing the Subsidized Child Care Service Application. The Subsidized Child Care Service Application can be obtained and submitted at the DC Department of Human Services (DHS) Child Care Services Division office located at 4001 South Capitol Street SE, Washington, DC 20032 or with the child care facility you have selected directly. (Note: Please inquire with the facility to ensure that they can provide their own intake).

After the Subsidized Child Care Service Application is submitted, an interview with the eligibility worker must take place. The purpose of the interview is to ensure that the eligibility worker has a thorough understanding of a family's need and satisfy all relevant eligibility factors.

### **What is the maximum income allowed for subsidy benefits?**

The income eligibility limits vary based on family size, the number of children in care, and amount of income. Please contact the DHS Child Care Services Division office or authorized child care providers to determine your specific eligibility category.

The Child Care Subsidy Program Parent Fee Final Rules can be found at [www.1.usa.gov/16zKGgZ](http://www.1.usa.gov/16zKGgZ) .

## IV. PARENT RESOURCES



### **LearnDC.org**

The LearnDC website empowers students, parents, educators and communities with the knowledge they need – from information about caring for a young child to tools for engaging with our local schools.

*Some of what you'll find...*

#### **Information About What's Taught in DC Classrooms**

Learn about Common Core State Standards, including how and why they are being implemented in DC and how they will be assessed.

#### **Strategies and Services to Support Young Children**

Access information about DC services for healthy early childhood development of young children and their families.

#### **Resource Library for Educators, Families and Community**

Explore a searchable and growing resource library of documents, videos, presentations, events and websites about education that create opportunities for DC kids in college, careers and life.

Start learning now at [www.LearnDC.org](http://www.LearnDC.org)





## **OSSE Child Care Connections**

OSSE Child Care Connections is DC’s child care resource and referral center. It is an interactive web-based resource that provides information and options for parents looking for high quality child care, before and after school programs as well as resources for child care providers.

Selecting the best care for your child is a very important decision and it starts with your needs. OSSE Child Care Connections makes it easy to view profiles of local licensed child care providers to find out what is available from the comfort of your home; allowing you to determine a high-quality early care and education programs for your child based on their individual need.

The OSSE Childcare Connections search page provides a list of licensed child care providers in the District of Columbia that meet your specific criteria such as type of care, age of child, location, services needed and much more. By checking the options that apply to you and then clicking on “view results”, you will be able to obtain the list of referred providers. You can adjust your selections and re-run the search as often as you need.

OSSE Child Care Connections also provides a free and confidential phone service for parents and guardians looking for a licensed child care through the OSSE referral hotline 202-719-6500-option 3.

# V. HIGH QUALITY EARLY LEARNING CHECKLIST

Your checklist to identify a high quality learning environment:



## Safe, Healthy, and Child-Friendly Environment

- Classrooms that are well-equipped with sufficient materials and toys
- Classrooms materials and activities are placed at eye level for the children to utilize
- Materials and toys that are clean, sanitized and neatly displayed
- Frequent hand-washing by children and adults
- Centers that encourage safe, outdoor playtime
- Visitors welcomed with appropriate parental consent







## **Stimulating Activities and Appropriately Structured Routines**

- Children who are engaged in their activities
- Children offered breakfast and lunch and a time to nap
- Children participating with teachers and each other in individual, small-group, and large-group activities
- Children receiving a variety of stimuli in their daily routine using indoor and outdoor spaces and age-appropriate language, literacy, math, science, art, music, movement, and dramatic play experiences
- Children who are allowed to play independently



## **Educated, Attentive, and Engaged Teachers and Staff**

- Qualified and effective teachers with specific training in early childhood education
- Low child-adult ratio
- Teachers who crouch to eye-level to speak to children, and who hold, cuddle, show affection, and speak directly to children
- Families and teachers exchanging information about the child's development and learning progress

**Notes:**





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