



## Parenting that Supports Preschool Literacy and Social Skills

**Previous research has identified different ways in which the home learning environments as well as parenting practices contribute to both a child's literacy and social skills.**

A US study set out to further investigate the effect of parenting practices in families of pre-schoolers in a middle-income community, with an eye to the contributions of these practices to children's literacy (knowledge of letters, sounds) and social skills (self-control, compliance).

A total of 229 families of pre-schoolers were recruited. Parents completed a survey describing their parenting practices, while children's literacy skills were directly assessed by using

standardised measures. Parents also reported on children's social skills. Overall, findings reveal that there are multiple, specific pathways through which parents of pre-schoolers support early learning of literacy and social skills of young children. In this study, researchers identified three important dimensions of parenting. Previous research has shown that these three primary dimensions of parenting demonstrated contributions to early literacy and social skills:

- Home learning environment: availability of academic/pre-school literacy materials and activities
- Parental warmth and support for child's autonomy: warmth and interest toward children as well as support for their autonomy
- Child management and discipline: teaching of appropriate and acceptable behaviour

### KEY FINDINGS

- The parenting practice, home learning environment, predicts literacy skills; letter and sound knowledge is likely best advanced through discussion of letters and sounds,

whereas vocabulary learning is likely best fostered by discussing new words (as often takes place during book reading).

- The parenting practice of management and discipline is uniquely linked to both their children's self-regulation and to cooperation and compliance. Parents' consistent rule setting and enforcement offers children opportunities to consider guidelines for behaviour and consequences for transgressions, which in turn helps them to develop self-regulation self-techniques for their independent actions and in their interactions with others.
- Parent-child interactions around letters and numbers (home learning environment) may present unique opportunities for children to take conversational turns, and work collaboratively. Although not causal in nature, this finding implies that parents could intentionally foster children's social development through the same practices that might support basic literacy development.

## THINGS YOU CAN DO

- ✓ Help expand vocabulary by providing and reading books that expose kids to words and ideas outside their daily experience.
- ✓ To improve children's decoding skills, employ activities focused particularly on discussion of letters and sounds, whereas vocabulary learning is likely best fostered by discussing new words such as during book reading.
- ✓ Conversations enhance vocabulary and language development. Sit together around the dinner table and talk over a meal. Ensure everyone has equal time and that eating together is modelled as an enjoyable chance to communicate.
- ✓ Take public transport for trips to museums, zoos, libraries, etc. Walk to the local shops. Make time to engage one-on-one with your child, rather than having to concentrate on driving and finding a parking spot.
- ✓ Constant exposure to puzzles, educational media (including monitored use of electronic devices), as well as toys or games all play a part in language and literacy development.
- ✓ Invite a few friends over for electronic free creative play, so that your child has a chance to practise social competence, including self-regulation and sharing as well as cooperation and compliance.

- ✓ Keep a box of dress-ups, crayons, glue, cardboard, blankets to make cubby houses under a folding table. Let kids free-range through materials provided to build, construct, imagine and create.
- ✓ Check out activities at your local library, or create your own story telling time. Encourage kids to write and illustrate their own stories or make their own bookmarks. Laminate their drawings and turn these into placemats.
- ✓ Adopt a parenting style low on authoritarian micro-management and high on nurturing, warmth, and appropriate praise and recognition.
- ✓ Work at positive parent-child exchanges to help kids model how they can engage with others. Include them in decision making (so what would be a good family outing today?) to help build their self-confidence, independence, and problem solving skills.
- ✓ Rules, guidelines, boundaries and consequences are essential for young kids to make sense of their world. Kids are more secure when they know and understand our expectations.
- ✓ Think of rules and boundaries in terms of 'management' (proactive monitoring and ongoing shaping of a child's behaviour) as opposed to 'discipline' (a corrective response to a transgression).

## TAKEAWAY

FROM PROFESSOR MICHAEL BERNARD  
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As parents, we are our child's first teacher. To do this job we don't need a degree in education. Providing learning activities and challenges, showing warmth and interest and effective management of children's behaviour can be entwined in reading a bedtime story. By talking to our children about words and ideas, demonstrating encouragement for kids to voice their own views and provide secure boundaries and rules for behaviour, different parenting practices contribute to both children's social and literacy development. These are the elements of parenting that help to give our kids a head start.

Source: A.H. Hindman & F.J. Morrison (2012). Differential contributions of three parenting dimensions to preschool literacy and social skills in a middle-income sample. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 58, 191-223.