

# Parenting Together

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## Literacy in the Early Years

There are many ways we can prepare young children for school. One of the keys to academic success is strong literacy skills, including the ability to read and write.

A child's journey toward literacy begins at birth, although it may be several years before they are actually ready to read and write. When infants and toddlers scribble with crayons or look at and play with books by lifting the flaps or pointing to pictures, they are building emergent literacy skills. There are many emergent literacy skills that we can support in these early years that pave the way to later literacy success.

### What is emergent literacy?

Emergent literacy include: meaning-related skills and code-related skills.

Meaning-related skills have to do with building an understanding of what is written in a book. These skills include vocabulary, story comprehension, and inferencing.

Code-related skills are the skills that will help children understand that the symbols they see on a page are actually letters and words that have meaning,



known as "print knowledge." Additional code-related skills include alphabet knowledge, sound awareness, and letter-sound knowledge.

### Supporting emergent literacy skills with interactive book reading

Reading books with young children is one of the best times for building emergent literacy skills. **How** a book is read can really make a difference. Rather than reading a book from start to finish while your child sits and listens, actively engaging your child with interaction during reading offers more opportunities to support emergent literacy. Depending upon the child's stage of language development, he could take turns in the conversation with sounds, pointing, gestures, or words.

#### Step 1: Observe, wait, listen

Observe, wait, and listen. Try waiting before or after you turn a page, or after you make a comment or ask a question. You are waiting to observe your child's interest, and to provide them with an opportunity to take a turn in the interaction. This is important, because once you know their interest, you can build on it to add vocabulary, enhance comprehension, or even to talk about letters, sounds, or print



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awareness. For example, perhaps you're reading *Goodnight, Gorilla* with your child and you pause on the first page, before starting to read. Maybe they will point to the gorilla. That point is their way of taking a turn in the interaction and showing you what interests them.

## Step 2: Follow your child's lead

Follow your child's lead by making a comment or asking a question based on their message and interest. In this example, you could make a comment by saying "That's a gorilla. It looks like he's taking the zookeeper's keys." This simple comment is helping develop your child's vocabulary by labeling the pictures he's interested in. It's also helping him start to understand the story structure by talking about what's happening in the book.

## Step 3: Continue the conversation

Start by waiting again to see if your child will take another turn in the conversation. Perhaps they will point to the gorilla again. If that happens, you could make a comment like, "That's the gorilla. He looks just like the gorilla we saw at the zoo yesterday." This comment is helping to link what's happening in the story with what is happening in their life, which will help build his inferencing skills.

By including these steps in your and your child's life, you can provide them with opportunities to make reading interactive. When you respond to

their turns by making comments or asking questions based on their interests, you are helping them to better understand the story, express their interests, and connect what they know with what they are learning. Through these conversations, you can introduce a multitude of early literacy skills.



### The Book Nook

The Book Hog  
by Greg Pizzoli

Lola at the Library / *Lola en la biblioteca*  
by Anna McQuinn

Books Always Everywhere  
by Jane Blatt



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## References

Helping Young Children to Develop Emergent Literacy Skills

<https://www.pathstoliteracy.org/helping-young-children-develop-emergent-literacy-skills>

Early Emergent Literacy

<http://literacy.nationaldb.org/index.php/early-emergent-literacy/>

What Children Need to Learn and How You Can Help Them Learn It

<http://www.hanen.org/Helpful-Info/Articles/Literacy-in-the-Early-Years--What-Children-Need-to.aspx>

