

## Early Emergent Literacy<sup>1</sup>

Literacy begins at birth and builds on relationships and experiences that occur during infancy and early childhood. For example, introducing a child to books at an early age contributes to a later interest in reading. Reading together while he or she sits on your lap promotes bonding and feelings of trust. The give-and-take nature of babbling, lap games, songs, and rhymes set the stage for sharing favorite picture books. Exposure to logos, signs, letters, and words leads to the knowledge that symbols have meaning. The acquisition of skills such as looking, gesturing, recognizing and understanding pictures, handling books, and scribbling lay the groundwork for conventional reading and writing.

A love of books, of holding a book, turning its pages, looking at its pictures, and living its fascinating stories goes hand-in-hand with a love of learning." (Laura Bush, 2003)

Children with combined vision and hearing loss miss out on many of the experiences that happen incidentally for other children, but rich early learning experiences can be provided when families, teachers, and caregivers build trusting relationships with these children, know what their favorite objects and activities are, and recognize their array of communication signals.

As you foster early literacy skills in a child who is deaf-blind, expect to see the child handling and exploring books and writing materials using all of his or her senses (sometimes in unconventional ways). Watch for the child to show signs of anticipation while playing turn-taking games or move in rhythm to songs and music you've listened to together. Allow children to get "up close and personal" to reading and writing items around the house. Point out and talk about signs, symbols, and words you see at school, day care, the grocery store, and out in the community.

It takes intentional planning to provide meaningful early learning experiences on which to build literacy skills. Following a child's lead provides a wealth of information about what will be most interesting and motivating to a particular child. Incorporating familiar and favorite objects, people, and activities into early learning experiences is essential to achieving positive results.

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<sup>1</sup> Literacy for Children with Combined Vision and Hearing Loss, <http://literacy.nationaldb.org/index.php/early-emergent-literacy/>



# 1. Modeling reading and writing behaviors

## What to do

- Let child know that you are going to be reading or writing by telling, signing, using an object cue or picture
- Bring child to where you are when you are reading and writing
- Describe what you're doing as you read and write (e.g. Mommy is paying bills, Daddy's reading the paper, teacher is taking attendance, Joey is working on the computer)
- Let child see/feel/hear/touch as you read and write (e.g. book, magazine, pen, checkbook, attendance sheet, computer)
- Let child know the activity is finished
- Let child explore reading and writing materials that others are using
- Use a similar format to expose children to reading and writing throughout the day and in a variety of places within the home, school and community

## Things to consider

- Has the team agreed on a communication method(s) that allows the child to understand what you are telling him about what's going to happen?
- Have you considered using hand-under-hand?
- Can the child access what you are doing in a way that makes sense to him? For example, will you let him feel or smell items if needed?
- What kind of back and forth interaction will you have when you're modeling these behaviors?



## 2. Embed the use of objects, symbols or words throughout the child's day

### What to do

- Label objects in the child's environment using pictures, words, braille and/or tactile symbols (e.g. bed, sink, coat hook, desk)
- Identify objects and symbols within routines and activities familiar to the child
- Use familiar objects or symbols to create an anticipation calendar or daily calendar
- Draw attention to words and text in the environment during child's daily routines and activities
- Identify the child's preferences and connect them to objects, symbols and words
- Teach child that objects and people exist, have names and have purpose/meaning
- Point out logos, signs, packages in the home, school and in the community
- Look at books, grocery ads, magazines and mail with the child

### Things to consider

- Are you looking at things from the child's perspective and selecting objects and symbols that match the child's experience of what you are trying to represent?
- Are you using cues in a consistent manner to help the child anticipate what is going to happen next?
- Have you provided materials in a variety of formats?
- Does the child have a way to actively engage with the materials?
- Have you noticed whether the child appears to have put some meaning to these activities?
- Have you seen the child respond in a consistent manner to objects, symbols and/or words? What is that response?
- Have you thought about how you present a new person, activity or experience as opposed to a familiar one?



### 3. Incorporate rhythm, music, finger plays and mime games

#### What to do

- Sing and play with child often, regardless of concerns about what he or she is hearing and seeing
- Look for opportunities within naturally occurring activities (e.g. in the car, on your lap, during dressing/undressing, playing with brothers and sisters, during transition times within classroom)
- Take advantage of times when the child is waiting for other things to happen (e.g. lunch line, bus ride, classmates going to the bathroom)
- Use music and activities that are the same/similar to what other children the same age would be involved with
- Add movement, tapping, vibrations to the activity
- Use a resonance board if you have one (or make one)
- Let the child lay on the floor and listen to loud music sometimes

#### Things to consider

- Are you making it fun?
- Have you chosen music and activities that are age appropriate?
- Are you taking turns?
- Are you observing what the child likes and doesn't like?
- Are you giving the child chances to ask for more? To signal "finished"?



## 4. Provide opportunities for handling and exploring reading and writing materials

### What to do

- Provide a variety of books, magazines and writing materials for the child to explore
- Allow the child to explore in whatever way(s) work best (initially may involve tasting, smelling or acting on the materials in a destructive way)
- Establish a consistent location for materials so child can access independently
- Allow children to explore writing using adapted and non-conventional materials if/when child is ready
- Provide opportunities for child to scribble, stamp, finger paint, use stickers and/or adapted writing tools
- Use techniques that make manipulating a book easier
- Facilitate book handling by showing a book to the child then demonstrating what to do with it

### Things to consider

- Have you provided materials in a variety of formats?
- Does the child have a way to actively engage with the materials?
- Are reading and writing materials found in a variety of places in your home or classroom?
- Is there a way for children to access materials on their own (if not mobile)?



## 5. Teach print and book awareness

### What to do

- Point out literacy behaviors as you engage in them
- Locate examples of print at home, at school and in the community and take child to where he/she can see/touch them
- Talk about front/back, top/bottom, open/close during book handling
- Allow child to scribble, stamp, finger paint, use stickers or alternative pencils
- Label objects at home and in the classroom using a variety of forms (objects, partial objects, pictures, tactile representations, print, braille)
- Match pictures to words
- Allow child access to books throughout the day
- Visit a library or bookstore and/or introduce the child to a keyboard, iPad or Kindle
- Use "big books" at home or in the classroom

### Things to consider

- Are you introducing children to a variety of forms of print?
- Are you signing as well as speaking?
- Is there a way for children to access books on their own (if not mobile)?
- Are you presenting the materials in a consistent manner each time you give them to the child?



## 6. Teach name, name sign and/or personal identifier of child and those the child interacts with on a regular basis

### What to do

- Identify the form of text that will work best for the child's name
- Use the child's name in naturally occurring times and situations at home, school and in the community
- Use the child's name any time a new person interacts with him or her
- Identify the people who are of interest to or interact regularly with the child and provide their name in a consistent way that makes sense to the child each time they interact
- Incorporate the child's name and other names in journals, stories, conversations and naturally occurring situations (e.g. attendance, lunch count)
- Teach child that every person has a name whether or not the person is an integral part of their life

### Things to consider

- Are you expecting the child to learn the names of too many people at a time?
- Are you: 1) indicating the child's name on his body and 2) your name on your body?
- Are all individuals identifying themselves in a consistent manner?
- Are you allowing enough wait time to see if the child responds?



## 7. Embed literacy learning activities into routines

### What to do

- Identify routines that are familiar to the child (eating, diapering, getting on the bus)
- Identify "script" that you will use during interactions with the child as you go through the routine
- Identify and collect materials or tangible symbols you will present when engaged in the routines
- Always present symbol when initiating routine
- Let child help gather materials that are needed to perform the routine
- Conduct the routine/activity
- Let the child know when you are finished
- Let the child help put things away
- Tell the child "finished" again

### Things to consider

- Are you presenting the materials in a consistent manner each time you give them to the child?
- What other routines can you identify? (going to the store, bedtime, Dr. appointment)
- Do you see the child anticipate what is going to happen next?
- Is the child processing information after the routine is completed? How do you know?

