

A Resource for Parents and Caring Adults of Preschool Children

Supporting Your Child's Emergent Literacy at Home

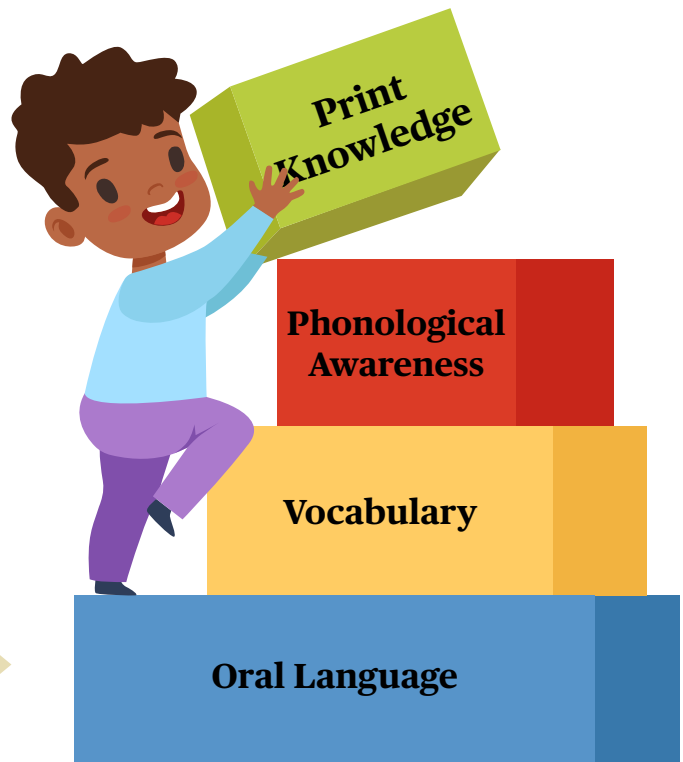
Learning to read begins at home. From birth, children begin developing language and literacy that help prepare them for reading! Parents and other caring adults help build these skills every day by playing, talking, listening, responding, sharing experiences, reading books, and showing interest in what children are doing. But there are lots of ways to make the most of everyday experiences to prepare children to become successful readers later in school.

Learning to read is not easy! There are language and literacy skills that are the building blocks for successful reading, called emergent literacy. At the preschool level, there are four important building blocks of emergent literacy:

Oral Language, Vocabulary, Phonological Awareness, and Print Knowledge. All four work together to help children later in school when formal reading instruction begins.

This resource provides ideas for building children's emergent literacy that can easily be done at home. It is organized by the four building blocks of emergent literacy. Each section describes the emergent literacy building block, why it is important, how it develops, and activities for parents and caring adults to do at home.

To get started, click on the emergent literacy building block you want to learn more about.



Learn More

This resource is part of the South Carolina *Professional Learning Community: Emergent Literacy* partnership. The information is based on the research and evidence-based instructional practices featured in the [Professional Learning Community: Emergent Literacy](#) materials and highlighted in the [Instructional Practices for Teaching Emergent Literacy at the Preschool Level](#) resource for teachers.

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References

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2024). Communication Milestones: Age Ranges. <https://www.asha.org/public/developmental-milestones/communication-milestones/>

Kosanovich, M., Phillips, B., & Willis, K. (2020). Professional Learning Community: Emergent Literacy: Participant Guide Modules 1 - 4 (REL 2020-021). Institute of Education Sciences. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Region/southeast/Publication/4022>

Regional Educational Laboratory Southeast. (2023, July). Instructional Practices for Teaching Emergent Literacy at the Preschool Level. Institute of Education Sciences. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Region/southeast/Resource/107271>

Additional Resources

For more activities and ideas to support your preschooler's emergent literacy skills at home, visit these websites:

Reading Rockets Literacy at Home Resources

- <https://www.readingrockets.org/literacy-home/reading-101-guide-parents/your-pre-kindergarten-child/oral-language-comprehension>
- <https://www.readingrockets.org/literacy-home/reading-101-guide-parents/your-pre-kindergarten-child/vocabulary-activities>
- <https://www.readingrockets.org/literacy-home/reading-101-guide-parents/your-pre-kindergarten-child/phonological-and-phonemic>
- <https://www.readingrockets.org/literacy-home/reading-101-guide-parents/your-pre-kindergarten-child/print-awareness-activities>

Florida Center for Reading Research Student Center Activities

- <https://fcrr.org/student-center-activities/pre-kindergarten>

PBS Kids for Parents: Literacy

- <https://www.pbs.org/parents/learn-grow/all-ages/literacy>

Colorín Colorado for Families

- <https://www.colorincolorado.org/families>

Supporting Your Child's Reading at Home (for children in kindergarten - 3rd grade)

- <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Region/southeast/Resource/100679>

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Oral Language is...

The way we communicate through speaking and listening.

- It is the foundation that supports all emergent literacy and later reading.
- It allows us to express and understand information, ideas, and feelings.
- It includes listening, rules for putting words and sentences together, and what you say and how you say it.

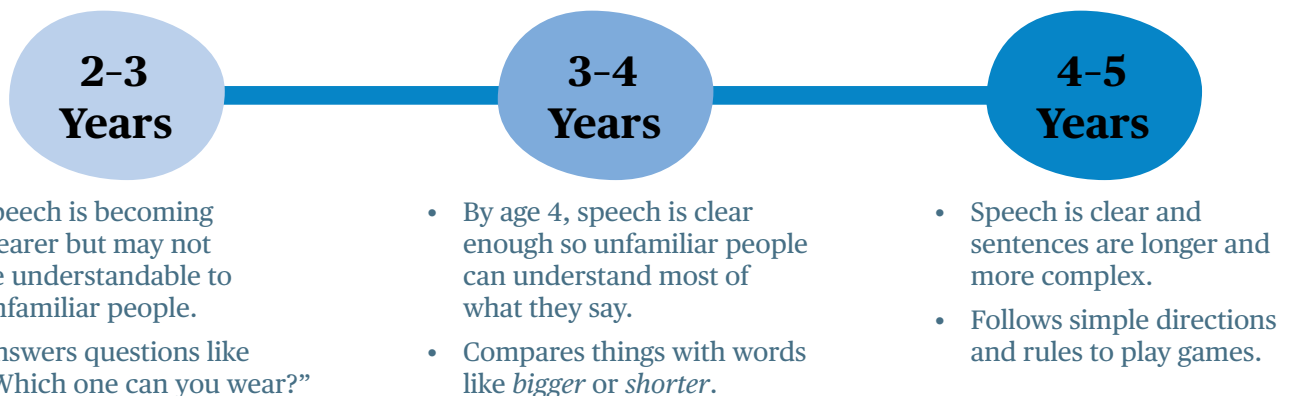


Why is oral language important?

Children with better oral language skills have an easier time learning to read. This is because the more language experience they have, the easier it will be for them to understand what is read to them and what they read later in school.

Oral language development

Children develop oral language from birth by interacting with caring people around them! The amount and quality of language children hear is very important to help them grow. Children develop oral language skills at different rates, but there is a general pattern to typical language development. Some examples of oral language development for children ages 2-5 include:



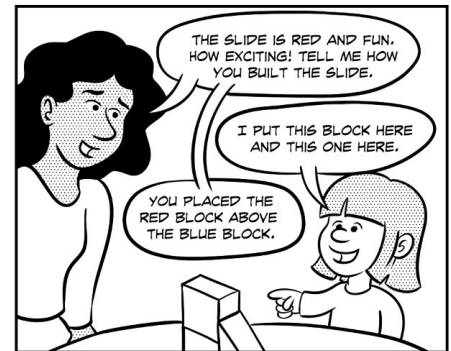
Adapted from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. For more communication milestones, visit <https://www.asha.org/public/developmental-milestones/communication-milestones/>

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Support Oral Language Development Everyday by...

Talking with your child

- Talk about everything!
 - What are you doing?
 - Who is that? Tell me about him/her.
 - How do you do that?
- Encourage storytelling.
 - Tell me more about that.
 - What do you think will happen?
 - What did you like about it?
- Provide opportunities for your child to play and talk with other children.
- Give your child many turns during a conversation by asking questions and making comments about what they say.



Listening and responding

- Make sure your child knows you are listening by getting on their level, waiting for them to finish, using facial expressions, and responding appropriately.
- Repeat what your child says using the correct word or phrase.
 - Child: I jumped highest of you!
 - Adult: Wow! You jumped higher than me!
- Repeat what your child says and add a little more.
 - Child: Baby crying.
 - Adult: Yes, maybe the baby is crying because he is tired. Let's put him to bed.

Sharing books and stories

- Books and stories are great conversation starters.
 - What was your favorite part?
 - Has that ever happened to you?
 - How would you feel if...?
 - What do you think will happen next?
- Select all kinds of books to read, for example informational books, story books, and picture books.
- Make comments and ask questions about the story and pictures as you read.
- Keep it fun and use it as a time to connect.



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Vocabulary is...

Knowing words and word meanings.

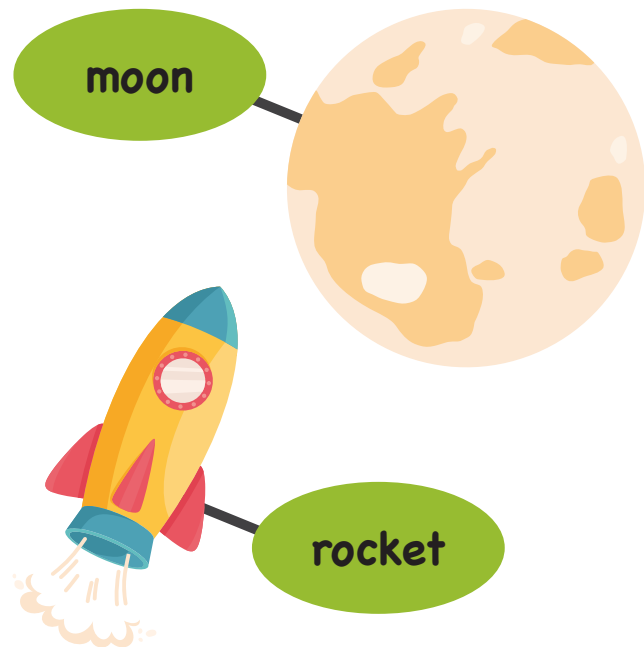
It includes using words that are said and understanding words that are heard.

Why is vocabulary important?

The more words a child knows and understands, the better they can communicate with others. When they get older and learn to read, the more words children know, the easier it is for them to recognize words in print and understand the meaning of what they read.

Vocabulary development

Vocabulary develops through experiences and interactions with caring people around them. The experiences and repeated exposure to lots of words help very young children make sense of the words they hear. The amount and types of vocabulary children hear is very important to help them grow. Some examples of vocabulary development for children ages 2-5 include:



2-3 Years

- Uses some plural words like *birds* or *toys* and "-ing" verbs, like *eating* or *running*.
- Gives reasons for things and events, like saying they need a coat when it's cold outside.

3-4 Years

- Understands and uses more location words, like *inside*, *on*, and *under*.
- Tells you a story from a book or a video.

4-5 Years

- Uses at least one irregular plural form, like *feet* or *mice*.
- Correctly uses more words for time, like *yesterday* and *tomorrow*.

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Support Vocabulary Development Everyday by...

Talking with your child

- Talk about everything!
 - What is that? Tell me about it.
 - What color is this? Shape?
 - What do we use this for?
- Use describing words and ask questions to talk about what you and your child are doing.
 - Look at that beautiful butterfly! Where do you think it is going?
- Explore places with your child and talk about what you are seeing, learning, and feeling.
- Provide time for your child to think about what they hear and what they want to say.



Using new words

- Explain new words simply when playing, talking, and sharing books.
 - Enormous means really big.
- Provide opportunities for your child to hear and practice new words lots of times.
- Use action words (sprint, leap) and descriptive words (colorful, sour).



Sharing books and stories

- Talk about new words in books and stories.
 - The rabbit sprinted. The rabbit ran really fast.
 - The leaves on that oak tree are colorful!
- Visit and check out many children's books from your public library.
- Label objects shown in the pictures of books you read.
- Ask a lot of questions to better understand stories that your child tells you.
- Keep it fun and use it as a time to connect.



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Phonological Awareness is...

Understanding that spoken language can be broken down into parts and the ability to hear, identify, and play with the parts of spoken language. Children show their knowledge using their speaking and listening skills. Examples include:

- Breaking words apart and putting them together (cup-cake; cupcake).
- Recognizing syllables in words (pic-nic).
- Rhyming words (fox, box).
- Listening for the first sound in words (Cathy caught a cute cat.).



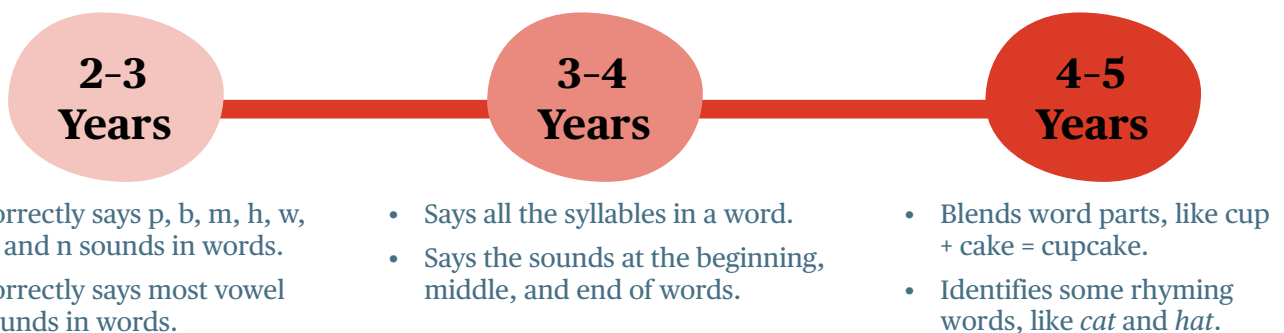
Why is phonological awareness important?

Being able to hear and recognize sounds is a very important skill for learning to read printed words when children get older.

All children need help to build phonological awareness so they can understand the connections between sounds and letters when they get older. This helps children “sound out” new words they see when they are older.

Phonological awareness development

Phonological awareness does not come naturally to all children. Although speaking and listening may not seem related to learning to read, being aware of sounds you hear in words is actually very important to reading! Before children learn to read, children need to be aware of the sounds in words before relating those sounds to print. Some examples of phonological awareness development for children ages 2-5 include:



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Support Phonological Awareness Everyday by...

Modeling good language habits

- Pronounce words and letter sounds clearly when playing, talking, and sharing books.
- Help your child say sounds that are new or difficult for them. Let them see how you move your mouth when you say a sound.



Playing with words and sounds

- Sing nursery rhymes, sing silly songs, and make up silly words or poems so that children can hear and say sounds in words.
- Play games with the sounds you hear in words.
 - Clap each syllable you hear in a word you say.
 - **M**ove when you say a word that starts with the M sound (mom, mouse, map). **S**top when you hear a word that starts with the S sound (sock, snack, sip).
- Ask questions about the words and sounds they hear throughout the day.
 - Let's build a doghouse for your stuffed toy! What words do you hear in *doghouse*?



Sharing books and stories

- Share books that are about playing with sounds. There are lots of books that feature compound words (cupcake), words with more than one syllable (pic-nic), words that rhyme (fox, box), and words that start with the same beginning sound (Matt makes macaroni or Cathy caught a cute cat) and more!
- Keep it fun and use it as a time to connect.



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Print Knowledge is...

Knowing letter names and the sounds they make (this letter's name is M; it makes the sound /m/).

Print knowledge is also about understanding how print works. For example, knowing that print is read from left to right (in English), that spaces appear between words, and knowing the parts of a book.

Why is print knowledge important?

Print knowledge helps children understand that there is a connection between written letters and spoken sounds. Understanding this connection will help them later in school when formal reading instruction begins.



Print knowledge development

Print knowledge and phonological awareness work together. Some examples of print knowledge development for children ages 3-5 include:

3-4 Years

- Pretends to read alone or with others.
- Recognizes signs and logos like STOP.
- Pretends to write or spell and can write some letters.

4-5 Years

- Locates the front of a book and its title.
- Recognizes and names 10 or more letters and can usually write their own name.
- Imitates reading and writing from left to right.

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Support Print Knowledge Everyday by...

Practicing letter names and letter sounds

- Point out letters and say their names. Include uppercase and lowercase letters.
- Make letters and talk about their name and sound.
 - Cut letters out of paper.
 - Trace letters in flour.
 - Bake letter cookies.
- Use print in your environment and point out letter names and sounds.
 - Cereal boxes
 - Junk mail
 - Street signs
 - Store names
 - Grocery store labels
- Make a game out of spotting letters and saying their sound
 - I spy an M! It says /m/. Now you find a letter!



Sharing books and stories

- Show the parts of a book and how to hold it.
 - Front cover and the title
 - The author and illustrator and what they do
 - Back of the book
- Point out where you begin reading, which direction to read, and where the sentence stops.
- Point out the difference between a letter and a word while reading.
- Ask your child to point out letters.
 - Your name starts with the letter B. Can you find a B on this page? Great! What sound does B say?
- Move your finger under each word as you read it. That helps your child connect the words you say with the words you are reading.
- Keep it fun and use it as a time to connect.

