

Literacy

A guide to help you think about supporting the development of literacy skills in children

Supporting members to provide the highest standards of care and learning for children

This practice guidance has been developed for all professionals including childminders, nursery workers and nannies

This guide covers:

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1. Introduction

Literacy is an important area of a child's learning and development and there are plenty of activities you can do that will make learning to read and write easier for children when they are ready. Sharing books, storytelling, mark making, talking, listening, signing/communicating using methods other than words, and symbolic play will all help build the foundations necessary for literacy. Awareness of the diversity of language and respecting multi lingual environments is important.

2. What do we mean by literacy?

The dictionary definition of literacy is being able to read and write, but acknowledging that people communicate in different ways, the National Literacy Trust defines literacy as the ability to read, write, speak and listen well. A literate person is able to communicate effectively with others and to understand written information.

3. Why literacy is important

Research shows that people with good literacy skills are more likely to have higher self-esteem, better health, better jobs and higher wages than those with poor literacy skills. They are more able to take advantage of the opportunities that life may offer them. (Literacy Changes Lives, September 2014)

Home nations statutory frameworks

Literacy is one of the specific areas of the Early years foundation stage statutory frameworks in England, and literacy features in the curriculum in Wales.

In England, the Early years foundation stage statutory frameworks state that *'It is crucial for children to develop a life-long love of reading. Reading consists of two dimensions: language comprehension and word reading. Language comprehension (necessary for both reading and writing) starts from birth. It only develops when adults talk with children about the world around them and the books (stories and non-fiction) they read with them, and enjoy rhymes, poems and songs together. Skilled word reading, taught later, involves both the speedy working out of the pronunciation of unfamiliar printed words (decoding) and the speedy recognition of familiar printed words. Writing involves transcription (spelling and handwriting) and composition (articulating ideas and structuring them in speech, before writing).'*

(EYFS statutory framework for childminders p9 and
EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers p11)

The early learning goals for Literacy in England (EYFS statutory framework for childminders Annex C p39 and EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers p14) are broken down into Comprehension, Word Reading and Writing; they include children at the expected level of development will:

- Read aloud simple sentences and books that are consistent with their phonic knowledge, including some common exception words.
- Demonstrate understanding of what has been read to them by retelling stories and narratives using their own words and recently introduced vocabulary, talk about what they've read and to write words in ways that match the spoken sounds.
- Write recognisable letters, most of which are correctly formed

These goals are for children reaching the end of the EYFS (at the end of the reception year at school). There are separate goals for Listening, Attention and Understanding, and Speaking, all of which are underpinning skills for literacy.



In Wales, the [Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings](#) states that;

“Language and communication is key to learning. Speech, language and communication should be developed holistically through real-life authentic experiences and play opportunities. We have a crucial role in providing the building blocks for language, beginning with supporting attention, listening and understanding. We can do this by ensuring that children are immersed in rich language experiences and activities to develop their listening, speaking and communication skills. When developing language and communication, we should ensure that children are given time to process what they hear and see, before responding, reflecting and revisiting. We must understand that some children will also communicate by means other than speech.”

Additional languages

Children living in Wales should also be helped to develop an understanding of the cultural identity unique to Wales including Wales’ position as a country with two languages. It is also important to show positive attitudes to speakers of languages other than Welsh and English. One of the ways this can be achieved, in line with literacy, is by providing and sharing bilingual books and resources.

4. How to support literacy development

The skills needed for literacy start developing when we are babies. Sharing books with babies and young children, providing opportunities for mark making, writing and reading yourself, and noticing print when you’re out and about – newspapers on a shelf, signs, leaflets, information boards. It all helps. As does talking to babies and young children, listening carefully to them from the earliest babbling.

The focus for babies and all young children should be on communication; then they will learn later to write down the words they can say.

Developmental Norms in literacy skills (England)

Birth to three- babies, toddlers and young children will be learning to...	Join in with songs and rhymes, copying sounds, rhythms, tunes and tempo; Enjoy sharing books with an adult; Enjoy drawing freely
3 & 4 year olds will be learning to...	Engage in extended conversations about stories, learning new vocabulary; Develop their phonological awareness; Use some of their print and letter knowledge in their early writing
Children in reception will be learning to...	Re-read these books to build up their confidence in word reading, their fluency and their understanding and enjoyment. Read individual letters by saying the sounds for them; Form lower-case and capital letters correctly

Development Matters P76 -83

As children get older and ready for school, they will give meaning to 'marks' as they draw and paint, and show an interest in illustrations and print in books and print in the environment. They will enjoy rhyme and show an awareness of it. And they'll start to be aware of the way stories are structured, listen to them with increasing attention and recall as well as suggesting how they might end. They will also be able to describe story settings, events and characters.

Sharing books

Sharing a book will not only give children the opportunity to hear words spoken in a structured way, either through poetry and rhyme, story or non-fiction, but it will encourage and foster communication, when you talk about what's happening in the book.

Talk about the pictures, the words, emotions aroused, situations and characters, and use book language for example, front cover, back cover, title, author, illustrations. **Revisit the same book** every day for a week to increase the child's involvement and relationship with it; notice them starting to anticipate what's coming next. **Use props/puppets** to bring stories to life for young children.

It's never too early to share books with children. **Watch this** film: [Maia's reading journey](#). It's interesting to follow a baby's journey and engagement with books from the very start of her life.

The [Talk to Your Baby](#) campaign encourages parents and practitioners to talk to babies from birth, stimulating the seventy-five per cent of brain development that occurs in the first two years of life. Simple, everyday activities, such as sharing books, talking, listening, and singing all help to support a baby's development.

There is also a Welsh Government Campaign: [Education Begins at Home](#) and a reading campaign by a group of national organisations: [Read On, Get On](#).

There are more ideas in the PACEY Practice Guide: Sharing Books.

Mark Making

As children shift from making their own meanings in their work to making marks that others can understand, for example alphabet, numbers, and representational drawings, the view and role of the adult becomes increasingly important.

Share with them the importance of print, that words on food packets and street signs as well as number and letters on car registrations and buses all carry meaning. Support children to be aware of these marks, work towards understanding them, and then to make their own marks and to experiment freely.

The adult's role is to listen to children and respond to what they are doing understanding that they can teach us and give their own marks meaning. Any marks may be given meaning. **Look out for emerging writing in scripts other than English** – other languages will have different alphabets, including the Welsh language.



Vary the media

Marks can be made in all sorts of media, for example clay, sand, soil, as well as on different types and colours of paper. Remember too that cutting and sticking is another way that children can make their mark. Young babies will make marks with their food. And water is great for making marks with, either with brushes or fingers. Paint with water outside on a sunny day, then watch it quickly disappear.

Creating an enabling environment is also the adult's role, as is providing a positive role model – **let the children see you write**, draw, paint, make marks. Have mark making materials in all areas of your setting including outside. **Make a portable mark-making box**, toolkit, trolley, belt, basket or backpack that the children can take wherever they need to.

Technology

Make the most of the mark making potential of technology. Use paint programmes on computers, and if you have access to tablets in your setting, drawing apps can be fun and involving. Word processing software shows the relation between keys and symbols on the screen, and if you can get hold of an old typewriter, children will love the immediate mechanical process of pressing the keys to see the letters appear on paper. Use cameras to take photographs and then use them to add speech bubbles, captions and make books. The National Literacy Trust have [information about the use of ICT and literacy in the early years](#).

There are more ideas in the PACEY Practice Guide: Mark Making And Representation.

Storytelling

“Storytelling and book reading are an easy way to have regular, additional talking time. Storytelling introduces structure and language patterns that help form the building blocks for reading and writing skills. Reading aloud combines the benefits of talking, listening and storytelling within a single activity and gets parents and carers talking regularly to young children.”

Talk to Your Baby campaign.

While sharing books is important, sharing stories is also vital for literacy skills. Children learn to develop their own narratives helping them understand the structure of books, and by the time they learn to write, they'll be brimming with ideas.

Without the book as a barrier, you have direct eye contact with the children, and you have the freedom to explore and develop a story together using characters, time, place and ideas inspired by children of all ages and abilities.

Story telling is a staple part of African culture where grandparents and elders in the community share stories from the past with children as a way of passing on the history to the next generation.

Where to begin?

Start with a story you know or tell a story from the day. Think about how you can root it in the children's experiences. Try collaborating with the children to agree characters, a setting, and a central question – a problem for the characters or something they need to find out. Use resources you have, for example, small world characters, or story sacks – see if you can tell the story using the props without the book.

5. Children with additional needs

If you have children who need to communicate in ways other than speech, talk to the parents about ways that they use, or integrate signing or picture representation into your setting. It can be helpful to use existing well-established systems such as Makaton or Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS).

Accessible books

Choose books that can be explored by all of the children you care for.

- Books with no words;
- Books that stimulate all the senses – touchy, feely books with different textures, and books that make sounds.

- Make sure you have a range of books, for example, picture books, factual books, and other types of print such as magazines and catalogues.

Booktrust has resources to help you choose [inclusive books](#), including early years books that show positive images of disability. [Bookmark](#) is a Booktrust web resource about books and disability. [Bookstart for all](#) also aims to make sure all children have access to books.

Inclusive books

Look at the pictures and read the words to make sure the books represent the children's backgrounds in a positive way, to name a few – blended families, white, black, Asian people, people with glasses, in wheelchairs, disabled people, and books which challenge gender stereotypes.

Early identification of need

Some children may struggle to communicate with others. They may have trouble learning words or putting words into sentences, have problems understanding what other people are saying to them, find it hard to make friends and interact socially with people in the right way, or be hard to understand because they can't say sounds the right way. If you are concerned about a child's speech, language and communication needs, talk to the parents in the first instance and then support them to get a referral to a speech and language therapist.



6. Children with English as an additional language

In Wales, books are an important part of creating a bilingual environment, so choose dual-language English/Welsh books and make them available in all areas of your setting. No matter where you live, choose dual-language books to explore in languages that are spoken at home by the children in your setting.

If you know another language is spoken at home and the child is not speaking as much as you might expect in your setting, **find out** from their parents how competent they are in the home language. (Remember that children with English as an additional language will go through a 'silent period' where the language is being absorbed before it is spoken).

Libraries

Libraries are a brilliant resource with a wide range of books, story CDs, DVDs as well as children's book-based events.

- **Find out** if your local library has any special schemes that your childcare setting can take advantage of, for example, group borrowing.
- Plan regular outings to the library. Tie an outing in with rhyme time, an author visit or other event.
- **Find out** if library staff can visit your setting, or if there is a mobile library service.

7. Working with parents

Give parents the confidence to support home learning by encouraging them to reflect on the way they interact with their children and show them how to make the most of everyday situations to enhance their children's development.

[Making it REAL](#) (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy) is a Department for Education funded project in England that reaches out to parents and families, building confidence and knowledge to support the early home learning environment. It has been shown to have a powerful impact on children's outcomes and on family literacy practice. Part of the thinking behind it is based on the ORIM Framework (see References below), which can really help when thinking about how you can support parents.

ORIM stands for

- Opportunities
- Recognition
- Interaction
- Models.

Parents can provide vital learning **opportunities** for children's literacy development such as giving children books, writing materials, and CDs or DVDs of nursery rhymes.

They can also provide unique encouragement by their **recognition** of the children's early achievements in spotting letters and logos, or early reading and writing.

Then children need their parents to **interact** with them, sharing and supporting them in real-life literacy tasks where children can make a meaningful contribution, such as writing a birthday card.

Parents can act as powerful **models** of users of literacy if children see them using literacy themselves in everyday life, such as reading a paper, writing notes or following written instructions.

As well as supporting parents to integrate learning into everyday life there are a number of practical ideas you can try to actively engage them: bringing the parents into your setting to share learning with them; giving parents activities to do at home; and home visits. Here are some suggestions:

Hold an event

Plan an event to **highlight one aspect of literacy**, for example, sharing books. Talk to the local library to see if they can get involved either by bringing along a box of books or by providing space at the library – this would encourage parents into the library too. Include storytelling sessions, book making, and have staff available to talk to parents about sharing books. Maybe plan an event for when you give out Bookstart packs and make an occasion out of it. Have some extra leaflets available that parents can take away on sharing books with young children. When planning an event, think about how you can involve parents that can't attend for example, parents working full-time.

Story sacks

Make story sacks for your favourite books; simplified versions of these can be made for the children to take home and explore. A story sack is a large cloth bag with a children's book and other supporting materials inside. You could include:

- a copy of the book
- a big book version
- a CD or DVD of the story
- related non-fiction books, models and objects from the story
- activities or games related to the story

The National Literacy Trust has more ideas on [story sacks](#) and examples using well-known books.



Travel teddy

Pick a special teddy that goes home with the children and a diary for the teddy where the children can draw pictures, stick photos or write one or two words about the teddy's adventures. This can also work if the family is happy to take the teddy away with them on holiday or a day trip on the weekend. When the teddy comes back into the setting, it provides a great starting point for conversation.

Take a book home

Perhaps the easiest idea is to allow children to take books home, share with their parents or carers and bring back when they are ready to. Have a selection of books available that the children can choose from.

Think about how you can engage parents with books and encourage them to share books with their children.

- Can you organise an event?
- Work in partnership with your local library?
- Make books part of an existing event?
- Create a family book area?
- Or allow children to choose books to take home and share?

There are more ideas in the PACEY Practice Guide: Supporting the home learning environment.

8. References

[Literacy Changes Lives 2014 – A new perspective on health, employment and crime](#)
Sept 2014

9. Resources

PACEY Practice Guides

- Sharing Books
- Mark Making and Representation
- Supporting the home learning environment

[Read on, Get on](#)

Wordsforlife.org.uk

Speech, Language and Communication Needs in the Early Years – I Can Talk series

Books

- **Tell Me (Children, Reading, & Talk) The Reading Environment** – How Adults Help Children Enjoy Books – Aiden Chambers

Websites and Organisations

- [I Can – the children’s communication charity](#)
- [Booktrust](#) has a website dedicated to children’s books, including recommended book lists and information and resources for National Children’s Book Week.
- [TES EYFS resources](#) on books
- [World Book Day](#)
- [National Literacy Trust](#)
- PDFs on [story sacks](#) and [Sharing books](#)
- [Talk To Your Baby](#) is a campaign run by the National Literacy Trust to encourage parents and carers to talk more to children from birth to three.
- [Bookmark](#) is a Booktrust web resource about books and disability, which aims to support the development of positive attitudes towards disability and includes views of young disabled people on their views on the role of children’s books.
- [Outside in World](#) An organisation promoting world literature for children.
- [Bookstart](#) is a national scheme that delivers free books to young children. They have an area on their website with resources for professionals.
- [Book touch](#) – for children who are blind or partially sighted
- [Bookshine](#) – for children who are deaf
- [Books in dual languages](#)
- The [Society for Storytelling Beginner’s Guide](#) is also a good place to start.

All the websites listed have useful information for childcare professionals no matter where you live, but the following websites are particularly targeted at people **in Wales**:

- [Book Trust Cymru](#)
- Also the [Super Box programme](#) gives early years professionals in Wales extra training and resources around book sharing.
- [Pori Drwy Stori](#) – a national programme in Wales by Booktrust Cymru. Funded by the Welsh Government to support literacy in the Foundation Phase.
- Welsh Government Campaigns: [Education Begins at Home](#) and [Make Time to Read/Rho Amser I Ddarllen](#) (these links are both to Facebook pages).

10. Frameworks and Legislation

England

Department for Education *Early years foundation stage statutory frameworks*.

Department for Education *Development Matters Non-statutory curriculum guidance for the early years foundation stage*

Wales

Welsh Government (2022) [Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings](#)

[Welsh Government \(2016\) National Minimum Standards for Regulated Child Care for children up to 12 years of age](#)

12. Support from PACEY

As a PACEY member you can get more help by visiting the website www.pacey.org.uk or by calling 0300 003 0005.

PACEY is the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years. Formed in 1977, we are a charity dedicated to supporting everyone involved in childcare and early years to provide high quality services, information and advice to children, their families and carers. We want all children to experience high quality childcare and early education, helping them to have a bright future.

Across England and Wales we provide training, expert advice, help and peer support to practitioners and practical and impartial support and information for families and carers and those advising them. We represent the views and experiences of practitioners and champion their vital role in helping prepare children for a bright future

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