

Especially for practitioners working with toddlers!

World of Learning

Literacy-Rich Experiences

Spending time in settings that encourage listening, speaking, and paying attention to written words is a huge plus for toddlers. Such opportunities are at the center of literacy-rich environments for toddlers.

What is the practice?

Provide toddlers with a literacy-rich environment. This means giving them many chances throughout the day to interact with books. Let them try varied writing and drawing materials. Look at and talk about letters, signs, and labels. Provide chances to listen to and talk with interested, responsive adults.

What does the practice look like?

Toddlers enjoy many types of experiences in a literacy-rich classroom. They can be playing with alphabet blocks or stamping with ABC letters. Alone or in groups, they can be looking at books from an easy-to-reach display. At circle time they can be singing nursery rhymes with their teacher and friends. Throughout the day, caregivers talk with the children about what they are doing. They also point out the everyday uses of functional literacy skills like writing lists, reading menus, and asking questions.



How do you do the practice?

Young children build literacy skills over time by having fun, meaningful experiences. These are based on their interests and build their confidence. Here are some ideas to try with the toddlers in your care.

- Book reading is an important part of literacy development for toddlers. Provide an attractive and often-changing display of books and magazines in a comfortable spot. This helps make book reading an everyday activity in which children can engage on their own or with friends and adults.
- Environmental print—in the form of labels, signs, and posters in your classroom—helps toddlers understand that print has practical uses. Calling children’s attention to printed matter in their classroom helps them become familiar with the way letters and words look. They begin to see patterns in print.
- Spoken language is the keystone of a literacy-rich environment for toddlers. Engage the children in continuous, meaningful, thought-provoking conversations about whatever is going on around them and whatever interests them. Building good speaking and listening skills will be the result.
- Even though toddlers are too young to “write” like adults, give them plenty of chances to experiment with making marks. Provide them with all sorts of surfaces. Let toddlers paint, draw, scribble, and play in sand or other tactile materials. Talk with them about what they are doing during these activities. You will be helping them take the first steps toward developing later writing skills.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Are children in your care seeking out literacy-related activities when they play?
- Do the children like to talk and listen?
- Do they enjoy scribbling?

Take a look at more learning opportunities

Words Are Everywhere!

Sela, age 2, looks forward to getting to her home childcare center. When she arrives she puts her coat on a hook labeled with her name and photo. Her teacher greets her warmly and asks how she is doing this morning, allowing Sela time to answer. She goes to the kitchen for breakfast, where the drawers and cups are labeled. After she eats, Sela joins a friend in the book corner under a bright poster that says "Book Nook." They look at a new book their teacher has placed there. Later, she and her classmates use cookie cutters in play dough. When they go outside, Sela and some friends play in the sand and then draw with chalk on the sidewalk. By the time Sela's mom picks her up, the toddler has had a whole day's worth of literacy learning experiences.



Trikes 'n' Words

Charlotte tries every day to give the toddlers in her care a well-rounded literacy experience. Her group enjoys playground time. Charlotte has found lots of opportunities outdoors to engage them in meaningful talk. She draws their attention to print and comments on the symbols and signs they see. When the children are riding tricycles, she places models of common street signs along the sidewalk. Some children in the group love to point out street signs like stop and yield. Charlotte talks with the children about all of the words on the signs. She explains how the signs help people know where they are and where they want to go. She knows the children enjoy these conversations because they often comment on the signs they see. They have started acting out the signs' meanings that Charlotte has explained to them.

Count Me In!

Carlo, a 26-month-old with motor impairments, participates in the same literacy activities as the other children in his inclusive class. His teacher provides easy access to oversized books, larger writing tools, and clips to hold papers steady for easy drawing. There are alphabet and word puzzles with grip-enhanced pieces so Carlo can hold onto them. He joins the other children in songs, fingerplays, and acting out stories with occasional physical assistance from teachers. One of Carlo's favorite things is the voice recorder. It allows him to record his "stories" and then see the result printed out in words. Throughout the day, the teachers talk to Carlo and the other children. They talk about what they are doing, what they are feeling, and what is coming next. This helps them make the connection between words and their meanings.

