



# Reading and Writing

## Introduction

When parents and caregivers read to their children early and often, they encourage children to grow and develop. Through early experiences with books and writing, children build vocabulary, learn the many uses of language, gain key communication skills, learn about people, places and things, and discover that words are truly wonderful. They also begin to understand symbols (letters stand for sounds, which stand for meaning) and become familiar with how books work (how to hold a book, how to turn pages, and so on).

Books also lead children to develop letter awareness and an understanding of print, which they will later need in order to learn how to read and write. In fact, after talking, reading is the next best thing parents can do to help their children thrive in school and in life. This parenting workshop is designed to offer strategies and activities that encourage parents to make reading and writing an essential part of every day—and to make it part of their daily routine. Through discussions, hands-on activities, take-home resources, and the “Reading & Writing” video, you'll find everything you need to:

- Communicate the importance of sharing books right from the start.
- Explore some of the different types of reading and storytelling experiences that children and parents can have together.
- Encourage parents and caregivers to offer children many opportunities to “write.”
- Promote questions and conversations about early reading and writing.
- Demonstrate activities that will encourage deep and meaningful adventures with books and writing.
- Offer strategies and tips on how to create a print-rich environment at home.
- Support parents who are not comfortable reading aloud or who can't find children's books in their preferred language.
- Try out and practice new ideas.
- Lead parents in reflecting on how they can apply what they have learned with their own children.

The Reading and Writing workshop has been divided into the following sections:

**Read Early, Read Often**—This section shares the importance of reading, sharing books, and introducing a wide range of books right from the start.

**Write Away**—This section focuses on the meaning behind a child's "scribbles" and the importance of encouraging children to draw early on.

**Beyond the Book**—This section shares ways that parents can build on books to create rich learning adventures.

As you lead this workshop, you'll be using the "Reading & Writing" video. In this 05:13 minute video you'll meet:

- Milo (3 years) as he paints and writes his name.
- Marcelo (20 months) as he acts out his stories and finds words on street signs.
- Eloise (3 years) and her brother Otis (16 months) as they read and draw side-by-side.
- Indy (8 months) and Nico (3 years) as they cuddle up and enjoy books.

## Preparing for the Workshop

Before you begin, read the "Parenting Videos Workshop Overview," which contains helpful tips and information about the workshop series. In addition, you will want to:

- Make copies of the following Parent Tips, available in English and Spanish. Have them ready for parents to pick up before the workshop begins or distribute them at the end.
  - *Good Books for Babies*
  - *Good Books for Toddlers*
  - *Let's Go to the Library!*
  - *Raising a Reader*
  - *Screen Time*
  - *Talk, Talk, Talk!*
  - *Additional Resources* (You may also want to display some of the books from this list.)
- Using the books, websites, and articles in the *Additional Resources* handout, refresh and update your knowledge of current thinking about how children learn to read and write (including the role of technology) so that you can answer parents' questions.

- Display an array of good books for babies and toddlers. Check with your local children's librarian or bookseller for appropriate titles. You may want to look for and include some of the books mentioned in the handouts above. Whenever possible, choose books in participants' home languages as part of a collection that features families of diverse backgrounds. (Note: For the "Bring Books To Life" activity below, you will need to supply specific books.)
- Watch the "Reading & Writing" video. Take notes as you watch (and as you read through this guide). Keep a notebook of additional ideas and questions. You know your group best, and you will need to adapt the workshop to fit the needs and interests of the participants.
- Decide on an opening icebreaker activity. You may want to tailor the activity to the theme of the workshop. For instance, you can ask each parent to name a favorite story, book, or character they remember from their childhood.
- Plan your time and create an agenda. Depending on your group, you may decide to do the sections in a different order.
- Gather your supplies, including chart paper and markers for writing participants' ideas and comments, as well as pencils, pens, and paper, and refreshments.
- If you are providing a series of workshops, have a flyer ready with future dates and times.

## **Section One: Read Early, Read Often**

### **Leading Your Group**

Begin by sharing the importance of introducing a wide range of books and reading every day right from the start. Emphasize that parents can read and talk about books in whatever language they feel most comfortable using. You can mention:

- When children have early experiences with books, they develop a rich vocabulary, gain comprehension and communication skills, discover some of the many ways that language can be used, and develop a love of words and stories that will last a lifetime.
- Babies enjoy looking at pictures and hearing the rhythm and words of the story. Through early exposure to books, babies learn the sounds of language and begin to learn what words mean. Books also provide a wonderful opportunity for babies to bond with caregivers.
- As toddlers hear books read aloud to them, they build vocabulary and comprehension skills and begin to become familiar with letters and the sounds that letters make. They also tune in to the sounds of words and begin to understand that the words on the page represent the sounds they hear. These skills will become essential as children learn to read and write.

- With babies and toddlers, you don't need to read all of the words in a book. Especially for younger children, reading can mean just looking at and talking about pictures or pointing to things on a page. Wordless picture books can be fun, too!
- Let your child set the pace and turn the pages if she wants to. When she gets tired or distracted, put the book down and return to it another time.
- The more you and your child talk while sharing a book, the more she will learn.
- Telling stories is an important part of reading. You can retell a story from memory (a family story, folktale, and so on), from a book you've read together, from family photos, or about your toddler's own experiences. It's a great way to build language, memory, and storytelling skills.
- When you read books, street signs, recipes, labels, lists, magazines, and newspapers with your child, he begins to understand the "conventions of print," which include knowledge such as that reading happens from left to right (depending on the language being read), you turn the pages of the book to advance the story, and pages are read in order.
- Books inspire your child's imagination and offer exposure to new and exciting worlds.
- Books help you and your child discover information and cultures around the world. Books expand your child's vision of what is possible and inspire new questions and curiosities.
- It is important for children to see that you love reading, too. As they see you read adult books, labels and street signs, and text messages, children will understand that reading is something grown-ups do and is an important part of most things that adults do. As children imitate your actions in "pretend" reading (such as turning the pages of a book and making up words), they are taking steps towards reading for real.
- Encourage grandparents, older siblings, and other family members to read aloud to little ones. Even older toddlers and preschoolers enjoy sharing their favorite books with babies!
- Discuss different ways that parents can create a print-rich environment at home. In addition to libraries that offer books and book-related programming for free, discount stores and used bookstores also offer inexpensive books. You can also make your own books at home. Magazines and newspapers also offer great reading opportunities. Even looking at the print on a cereal box or on a street sign outside can be a reading adventure.
- Expand the discussion of libraries to include information about how to get a free library card, the kinds of programming available in libraries, and how families can visit not only their local library, but also libraries in neighboring towns and cities.

### **Chat and Share**

Encourage parents to think about the role that books and reading play in their children's lives. You can ask:

- What times of day do you read together with your children? Do you have an established routine for bedtime or naptime stories?
- What does your little one like to do with a book?
- How does she respond when you read to her?
- Does your child notice print in other places? If so, where?

NOTE: Write down any additional questions that you would like to include. Is there an anecdote or appropriate photo from your own life that you can share? Add that, too.

### **Watching and Learning**

Watch the entire “Reading & Writing” video together. (Note: You will have an opportunity to return to various segments of the video throughout the workshop.) Note what participants find especially funny and/or interesting.

### **Reviewing and Reflecting**

Lead a conversation about things parents noticed in the video. You might ask:

- The video showed a variety of reading adventures. What are the different ways parents or grandparents shared books? In what other ways do you and your children enjoy books together? In the video, Milo's grandmother mentions that she and Milo used to sit for hours and read books together. Now she's noticed that he is beginning to understand that the letters are the things that you read. What discoveries have you noticed your child making as you read together?
- Nico's mom notices that reading together has been a way for her and Nico to connect and strengthen their bond. Have you noticed that books bring you and your children closer together? Are there any examples that you can share with the group?
- Do other parents in the video mention experiences that resonate with you? If so, what are they?

### **Trying It Out**

**Read-Aloud Role Play.** Parents may not be comfortable or knowledgeable about how to read books aloud with their children. To help model good read-aloud routines, choose a book from the display to read aloud to the group. Note the techniques you are using, including:

- Reading slowly and clearly.
- Using an expressive voice.
- Adding sound effects (if applicable).

- Looking at the cover to predict what the book is about. For older toddlers, you may want to point to the title and read aloud the names of the author and illustrator.
- Pausing to ask questions, talk about the story or the characters, or point out details in pictures.
- Letting your child set the pace for turning pages.
- Having fun!

Remind parents that there are alternative ways to “read” aloud, including taking a “picture walk” (previewing or telling the story in your own words by just looking at the pictures). Ask for volunteers to share another book with the group.

***Favorites.*** Help parents become familiar with good children’s books.

It’s common for children to have favorite books that they want to hear again and again. Several parents in the video talk about their kids reading the same book so many times that the child has memorized it. Stress that repeated reading is something that should be encouraged. Just like a favorite song, a favorite book just keeps getting better and better. With each read, your child will make new discoveries. Help parents generate a list of favorite books.

- You may want to begin by asking parents to remember any favorite books or reading experiences that they recall from their early childhood. What kind of book was it? Who read it to them—mom, dad, older sibling, grandparent? (Note: There may be parents in your workshop who were not read to as children. Acknowledge this and provide an alternate question or eliminate this step.)
- Go around the room and ask parents to share their children's ages (if they haven’t already) and their favorite books.
- Write what parents say on a whiteboard or chart paper. Ask parents to reflect upon what their children seem to like about these books.
- Talk together about the types of books that children tend to like at each age and stage. Just like 16-month-old Otis, babies tend to like books with bright colors and textures. Two- and three-year-olds such as Milo, Eloise, and Nico often like rhyming books, books with lots of humor, and books with repeating phrases.

## Section Two: Write Away

### Leading Your Group

Begin by sharing the importance of early “writing.” You can mention:

- Your child's “scribbles” and drawings are actually his first experiences with writing. His loops and zigzags will eventually become pictures, symbols, and letters. Just as children babble before they say words, they enjoy making marks and imitating drawing and writing long before they think of their marks as meaning something.
- Coloring, painting, and drawing are not just ways for children to express themselves. As they paint and draw, they get more and more comfortable with the tools and hand-eye movements used for writing.
- For a baby or toddler, the process of drawing or writing is just as important as the result. For example, a child may enjoy the feeling of making swirls in finger paint or “painting” water on a sidewalk. She might make a crayon hop like a bunny, or scribble over a drawing because “there was a big snow storm.”
- Don't assume that you know whether a child means his scribbles to be pictures, shapes, letters, or just scribbling. Give him a chance to tell you. Then keep the conversation going with specific comments, questions, and responses. You may want to point out the shapes, colors, and images that you notice.
- Keep materials where children can reach them. You might want to dedicate a low shelf to hold crayons and paper. This will encourage your child to draw and create when the mood strikes and will help to make “writing” a part of your child's daily routine.
- Transform a wall or door in your house into a little gallery of your child's creations. This will help give her the message that her writings and drawings matter.
- Children love to imitate their parents. When you write—a note, a shopping list, or a thank-you letter—offer supplies so your child can write one, too.

### Chat and Share

Encourage parents to think about their children's explorations with early writing. You can ask:

- What do you notice about your children's drawings?
- What types of drawing materials do your children like to use?
- Do your children tell you about their creations? If so, what do they say?

NOTE: If you have any samples of children's artwork or early writings, bring these in and share them with the group. Write a list of questions about these samples to help spark conversation.

### Watching and Learning

Begin the video at 00:51, as Milo's grandmother is laying out the paper. Pause at 01:37, after Eloise's mom says, "Pretend it's spring and then nighttime."

### Reviewing and Reflecting

Lead a conversation about things parents noticed in the video. You might ask:

- What are the different ways that Milo and Eloise use the art supplies?
- What are some additional questions that Eloise's mom might ask to inspire a conversation or story around Eloise's drawing?
- Now show the picture of Milo standing above his painting at 01:06 and ask, *What do you notice about Milo's early letters?* You might point out that some of the letters are backwards and some are forwards. Mention that this is a great example of how children first begin to write letters. This type of writing does not need to be corrected and, in fact, should be encouraged.
- Brainstorm with the group ways they can create a writing "center" in their home—on a shelf, in a closet, in a bin, etc.

### Trying It Out

**Ask the Artist.** Make the most of a child's drawing.

- Have parents pair up, and give each pair a sheet of paper.
- Now assign one parent the role of the artist-child and one the role of the grown-up.
- Instruct the artist to draw a picture as if he were a young child.
- Instruct the grown-up to come up with at least five questions she might ask the artist to encourage a conversation around the creation.
- Gather as a group and ask parents to reflect upon the experience. What types of questions were most effective? Did asking questions make them look at the art differently?
- Encourage parents to ask similar questions as their own children draw and create.

**Writing Games.** Watch the section where Eloise and her mom are drawing. Mention how they are taking turns and building a story as they go. It's almost like a game. Encourage families to play writing games at home. Here are two games parents can try at the workshop:

- *Pass the Page.* Have one person begin by drawing a simple shape on the page. Now have her pass the page to her partner. The partner should now add his own shape. Pairs should continue passing the paper back and forth until each has had several turns. Now they can sit back and say what they see.



- *Draw What You Hear.* Turn on some music and encourage participants to “draw what they hear.” When the song is over, have participants tell you the story of what is on their page. Encourage parents to play this game at home and to write down the story that their child tells. Mention that this will help him to build the link between spoken and written words.
  - Remind parents to write exactly what children say. There is no need to correct improper language or grammar. Children are still discovering words and will be more encouraged to keep “talking and telling” if they aren't concerned about getting it “right.”
  - Children can also add their name to anything they create. Writing a shape or squiggle to represent a letter or a whole word is a great start.

## Section Three: Beyond the Book

### Leading Your Group

Discuss some of the many ways that parents can go "beyond books" to enhance learning adventures, creative explorations, and hands-on discoveries. You can mention:

- Choose books about topics that particularly interest your child, such as sharks or trains or dancing. After you are done reading, look up more information on the Web or take a trip to the library and check out some books on the topic. Ask, *What do you want to learn more about?*
- Pause to ask lots of questions as you read. This helps keeps the conversation going and also helps your child relate to the story. Ask: *What do you think is going to happen next?* and *What would you do if that happened to you?*
- Other ways to go “beyond the book” include:
  - Draw your own illustrations for a book you've read on a separate sheet of paper.
  - Try something you've learned about in a book.
  - Act out the story, a continuation of the story, or another version.
  - Integrate stories or story characters into pretend play.
  - Refer to books as you are going about your daily routines. For instance, if you've enjoyed *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus* by Mo Willems, you can look for birds or buses on your daily walk. A favorite joke might become: *Do you think there is a pigeon driving that bus?*

### Chat and Share

Encourage parents to think about ways that they explore books. You can ask:

- What are some ways that you build upon the books you read with your children?
- How do your children integrate themes and characters from books into their play?

### Watching and Learning, Part 1

Play the video beginning at 02:32, as Eloise and her mom are reading *Knuffle Bunny* by Mo Willems, and play through until 03:33, as Otis and Eloise are reading books on the couch. Ask parents to pay particular attention to the ways that Indy and Otis interact with books.

### Reviewing and Reflecting

Lead a conversation about things parents noticed in the video. Mention that the scenes with Indy and Otis demonstrate that children are never too young to start sharing a book. Though these little ones may not be talking, they can still be engaged in the words, pictures, and sounds of the stories that you read. You might ask:

- What type of book is Indy “reading” with her mom? How does she interact with the illustrations? How does her mom involve her in exploring the images?
- What do you notice about the books that Otis chooses? How are they different from his older sister's books?

### Trying It Out

**Babies Go Beyond.** Brainstorm ways that parents can go “beyond the book” with babies.

- Distribute several board books among parents. Make sure that you have an array of books, including touch-and-feel books and lift-the-flap books.
- Organize pairs of parents and ask them to brainstorm ways that they might use the books as a springboard for further learning.
- Suggest that one way to go “beyond the book” is to use a favorite board book as a springboard for a language-building scavenger hunt. Parents can take a book along on their daily routines. Together with their little one, they can hunt for things found in the pictures. If the book features a dog, families might try to spot a dog in the real world. When they locate their target object, they can point to the picture and say “dog” and then point to the real animal and say “dog.”

## Watching and Learning, Part 2

Now watch 03:35–04:30 of the video. Encourage parents to pay particular attention to the ways that Milo and Marcelo interact with books and go beyond what is on the page.

## Reviewing and Reflecting

Lead a conversation about things parents noticed in the video. You might ask:

- Milo is reading a book about a baby monkey. His grandmother uses the characters in his book to draw a connection to when Milo was a baby. This leads Milo to tell a story about when he was in his mother's stomach. What is a next step that she can take with Milo's story? Perhaps she could encourage him to dictate his story and then illustrate the words. What are some other ideas?
- Marcelo's parents observe that after reading books he is excited to find things from the books in the real world. He also gets so excited about the things he reads that he jumps up to sing and dance! What are some ways that they can build upon his excitement?

## Trying It Out

**Bring Books to Life.** Play a charades-type game inspired by a children's picture book.

- Use a picture book, such as *From Head to Toe* by Eric Carle, *Ten, Nine, Eight* by Molly Bang, or *Building a House* by Byron Barton.
- Ask for a volunteer and show him a picture from the book that involves some kind of action. Ask the volunteer to act out the picture.
- Now pass the book around the room and ask parents to guess which picture the volunteer was acting out.
- Encourage parents to play this game with their own children. Explain that games like this build vocabulary and comprehension skills.

## Wrapping Up

As you say goodbye to your group, remind parents that they have everything they need to give their children a rich experience with reading and writing. You might say:

- You're already doing it. Just have fun with books and give your child lots of opportunities to enjoy reading.
- Make sure you encourage your child to write by having crayons, markers, and paint available. Praise your child's early efforts and display his creations for all to see.
- Point out print everywhere you go so your child can discover just how important reading is.

**Reading and Writing** (CONTINUED)

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- Ask questions as you share books together, read with expression, add sound effects—and have fun!
- Share your love of books with your little one. If she sees you loving books, she'll love them too!

If possible, leave time so parents can mingle and chat with one another, talk with you individually, and browse the books and other materials you've brought.

### **MASSACHUSETTS EARLY LEARNING GUIDELINES FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS**

The Reading and Writing workshop has been designed to meet the Massachusetts Early Learning Guidelines for Infants and Toddlers. The purpose for these guidelines, developed by the Massachusetts Association for the Education of Young Children for the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) in 2010, is to provide a comprehensive view of the development of infants and toddlers while documenting the experiences that support this development. The guidelines are for parents as well as early education and care professionals.

The first three years of life are a time of rapid brain development and learning. This time becomes critically important for infants and toddlers as they develop foundations for learning. As their children's first teachers, parents have the greatest impact on their children's lives.

Early learning and development are multidimensional. Developmental domains (categories or dimensions of children's learning and development) are highly interrelated. Development in one domain influences development in other domains.

For more information about the guidelines, including definitions of terms, visit <http://www.mass.gov/edu/birth-grade-12/early-education-and-care/curriculum-and-learning/>.

The Reading and Writing workshop aligns with the following guidelines:

#### **FOR BABIES (0-15 MONTHS)**

##### *Language and Communication Development*

- Demonstrates the meaning of language by listening.
- Develops expressive language.
- Engages in social communication.
- Engages in pre-reading activities.
- Demonstrates interest and engagement in print literacy materials.
- Develops emergent writing skills.
- Develops in multiple language acquisitions when considered a dual language learner.

##### *Cognitive Development*

- Refines reflexes into purposeful actions.
- Discovers creative expression through music, drama, dance, and art experiences.
- Becomes aware of family and others in the community.

##### *Social and Emotional Development*

- Relates to, trusts, and becomes attached to consistent educators.
- Acts as a social being by engaging with others and the world around them.

- Experiences and expresses a range of emotions.
- Develops a positive sense of self.

*Approaches to Learning*

- Shows eagerness and curiosity as a learner.
- Becomes intentional and persistent in their learning and discovery.

**FOR TODDLERS (12-33 MONTHS)**

*Language and Communication Development*

- Demonstrates an understanding of spoken (or signed) language.
- Develops expressive language.
- Engages in social communication.
- Uses language to ask questions and tell stories.
- Demonstrates phonological awareness in language play.
- Develops grammar and syntax.
- Engages in pre-reading activities.
- Demonstrates interest and engagement in print literacy materials.
- Develops vocabulary, syntax, and socially appropriate communication in both languages when considered a dual language learner.
- Learns control over their movements as they reach out and grasp objects.

*Cognitive Development*

- Develops increasing memory of past events and knowledge.
- Discovers creative expression through music, drama, dance, and art experiences.
- Becomes aware of family and others in the community.
- Begins to develop the foundations for social science.

*Social and Emotional Development*

- Relates to, trusts, and becomes attached to consistent educators.
- Experiences and expresses a range of emotions.
- Progresses in regulating own feelings and behavior.
- Develops a positive sense of self.

*Approaches to Learning*

- Shows eagerness and curiosity as a learner.
- Becomes intentional and persistent in their learning and discovery.