

Early Literacy & AAC

Every child is able to learn to read and write. Most importantly, children should be able to recognize themselves as “a reader” and “a writer”, no matter their abilities to access and interact with pencils and text. There are a variety of ways you can incorporate literacy throughout your day, much past preschool literacy activities. Here are some ideas to consider:

Everyday Opportunities:

- Model literacy:
 - Write out in short, simple sentences what the routine is for the day on the fridge/classroom board.
 - Write a letter to your child daily, or create “mail”, then read it through with your child. They can also “write” letters back to you or another family member.
- Create an alphabet book with pictures from family photos, magazines, small objects from around the house or printed pictures by searching on ‘Google’. Don’t worry about going in alphabetical order and allow multiple pages for the same letter if it is meaningful (i.e. “D is for Daddy”, “D is for “Danny”, “D is for dump trucks”).
- Co-write text messages or emails to family and friends, even if it includes many of the same letters, squiggles/scribbling, or letters that a child has pointed at with their finger or their eyes.
- Have kids make ‘lists’ of what they would like either for grocery shopping, or as a wish list (i.e. activities or token after chores, reCompleting homework, etc.)

Simple Strategies:

- Provide opportunities for your child to “write” and then talk about what it means as *well* as talk about what to write first, and then write it out. As adults, we use both pre-meditated writing, and thinking while we write. “Talking about writing” is a great opportunity for you and your child to practice using their AAC system. You can talk about the people, actions, describing words, activities and more that your writing is about without worrying about the *act* of writing.
- Allow the child to “write” without worrying about his formation of the letters or whether letters, order, and grammar is appropriate. After your child lets you know they are finished and what the message is about, go back and write it below adding, “This is how I would write _____”. You can note any similarities to what you both wrote down (i.e. “Look, we both wrote a loop to make the ‘o’ in ‘toy’”).
- When reading through a book, stop to comment about a page, ask a question (giving them time to answer), and then respond with another comment (CAR)
- Make sure to offer kids at least 20+ books to choose from, rotating all but the favourite books regularly. Be sure to include non-fiction “fact” books as well as fictional stories.
- Create your own book using pictures to make your child the star of the show! Co-write what is happening.
- If focusing on letter and sound identification, focus on 2 letters at once so you can contrast how they are different. Once you have focused on a letter for a week, drop one of the two, and add a new one.
- If your child always tends to read ‘memorized’ text without showing understanding, take over as reader to let yourself pace the interaction

- To increase engagement of books or for those that have difficulty turning pages, take pictures of books on a tablet and use the photos folder to 'swipe' pages as you read them. These pictures could also be loaded onto PowerPoint for use with a switch or with a bigger group of readers.
- Talk about "reading in your head" as you read lists, text, and books with your child
- Always have multiple writing utensils, such as a fat pencil, a variety of adapted pencils*, a keyboard, or a letter-board
- Keep track of writing samples in a book or take pictures – they are wonderful to celebrate as you start to see patterns of change
- If your child seems to have "outgrown" all the repetitive, well-loved texts you have available (i.e. "Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?", Robert Munsch, etc.), consider creating your own book with a similar, fun repetitive line.

Using Your No-Tech, Low-Tech or High-Tech AAC Systems

- Your child can create a simple story by selecting between symbols or phrases for each of a beginning, middle and an end. You can also help practice navigating through categories to find 'who' you will write about (people), 'what' will happen (actions) and 'where' (places) as you set the scene.
- Let your child be a storyteller. Record the story that your child has created onto a Step-by-Step™, so that he/she can read it over and over to and with different partners.
- Children can also use computers and some speech-generating devices with programmed pages to explore books – have your child finish the story, talk about what they liked, or come up with a "Part 2"
- Consider creating a "Reading" page with vocabulary related to book-reading that you could use with multiple texts, both fictional and non-fictional

Online Resources:

- **Star Fall** – <http://www.starfall.com> – Activities to teach children to read and to engage in exciting interactive books and phonics games. This is perfect for early grades too -
- **Tarheel Reader** - <http://tarheelreader.org/> - Allows you to search for topic-specific books (e.g. "ceiling fans", "ironing", "hamburgers") that still have simple text despite young and older-reader content.
 - Adjust 'reviewed' to broaden selection
 - Change topic to 'alphabet' with a favourite subject to expand letter and sound practice or search "rime" for a variety of rhyming books
 - Adjust the 'Gear' settings to add a voice, increase the size of the paging buttons, or change the background
 - Press the 'heart' to save favorite books to read over again
 - Download favourite books to re-read anywhere you go
- **Tumblebooks and Tumblereadables** – <http://www.tumblebooklibrary.com> – Online access to children's books
- **Bookshare for Canada** – <http://bookshare.org/home?c=ca> – Check out this site where members can access a large collection of accessible books.
- **My Own Bookshelf** – <http://www.bridges-canada.com/Product/ProductDisp.aspx?id=398&Search=my+own+bookshelf> – Software that allows you to create simple electronic books. These books can be accessed on the computer via a mouse, IntelliKeys keyboard or switches and scanning.