



SPECIAL INITIATIVE IN DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

# Literacy Promotion Guide

for Pediatric Healthcare Providers



[reachoutandread.org](http://reachoutandread.org)







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## **SPECIAL THANKS**

The children and families of the Center for Children with Special Needs and Floating Hospital for Children at Tufts Medical Center, and Perkins School for the Blind

Drs. Laura Arvidson-Guzman, Charles Hannum, Karen Miller, and Peter Murray

Julia Haft, Tufts University Child Development Summer Intern

Emily Marsh, The Sketchy Pixel

Jessica McDaniel, Boston Baby Photos

Perkins School for the Blind

Reflection Films

Yvonne N. Whitaker, Foundation Lead, NCR Corporation

Funding for The Developmental Disabilities Literacy Promotion Guide for Pediatric Healthcare Providers generously provided by NCR Foundation.



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# Introduction

## **The Developmental Disabilities Literacy Promotion Guide**

### **For Pediatric Healthcare Providers**



**Dr. Monica H. Ultmann**

Reading to her granddaughter

The Developmental Disabilities Literacy Promotion Guide was developed for primary care providers who treat infants and children with developmental challenges and provide support, advice, and helpful resources to their families. It was developed in collaboration with the professionals of the Reach Out and Read National Center and is part of their Special Initiatives program. The guide is designed to be used as a point of reference for healthcare providers already trained in the Reach Out and Read model of early literacy promotion and parent engagement, although new providers and trainees are also welcome to use the material.

The concept for this guide is based on the mandates of the many professional organizations that encourage healthcare practitioners to screen for and identify, at earlier ages, infants and children at risk for developmental disabilities, and to create medical homes for their ongoing primary care. The content provided within this guide supports the efforts of primary care providers who care for this complex group of children, as they provide anticipatory guidance and resources to parents and caretakers.

Each delay/disorder-specific handout for families, included in the material in separate tear-off sheets, provides advice for parents/caretakers about the importance of reading with their child, suggested books by age group, and internet resources and books they can turn to for reliable information and support. Eight developmental disabilities are included: Speech and Language Delay; Autism Spectrum Disorder; Motor Delay; Developmental Delay; Hearing Loss; Vision Loss; Short Attention Span, High Activity Level, or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder; and Learning Style Differences.

New information to share with parents is always emerging. We hope that you find this guide informative and helpful during your busy clinical day, as you introduce literacy promotion to some of the thousands of children with developmental disabilities (and their families) that Reach Out and Read serves. If you have questions and ideas or suggestions to share, please email [info@reachoutandread.org](mailto:info@reachoutandread.org).

Sincerely,

Monica H. Ultmann, M.D.

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# Emergent Literacy

## **Concept, Challenges, and Implications for Infants and Children with Developmental Disabilities**

Emergent literacy refers to the steps infants and children progress through as they master the complex requisites for reading and writing. In addition to being a cognitive process, literacy acquisition involves a fine-tuned balance of linguistic, psychological, and social factors depending heavily on the attachments formed with important people in a child's immediate environment.

Acquiring language and literacy skills involves integrating literacy practices and routines into the everyday lives of families by:

- Early verbal and nonverbal interactions
- Opportunities to physically explore
- Daily exposure to reading aloud and/or oral stories
- Engaging toddlers in “playtalk” or imaginative, rich conversations that help to build oral language
- Word games (rhyming, singing, poetry)
- Scribbling and drawing
- Conversations about books and stories

For infants and children with suspected or diagnosed developmental disabilities, the process of acquiring early language and literacy skills may be slower and more difficult because of:

- Atypical social/emotional development
- Attachment and parent/child interactions
- Limited sensory and/or cognitive skills
- Physical constraints
- Attentional challenges
- Motor planning/mobility
- Misunderstanding a child's abilities





## Using Books During the Check-Up

### **Utilizing Books for Developmental Surveillance**

#### **Touchpoints for Anticipatory Guidance in Typically Functioning Infants and Children and those with Developmental Concerns**

Giving a book to a child during a routine health maintenance visit allows the healthcare provider a unique opportunity to relate to the child and the family. When a child picks up a book, opens it, and begins to interact with its content, the healthcare provider can view the child through a different lens. Though not considered a screening tool because of the inherent lack of standardization, introducing books can serve as a unique way to observe the child's developmental skills and interaction with his or her parent or caretaker.

The following can be observed during an examination, dependent on the age and developmental level of the child:

- Eye contact: normal, brief, sustained
- Attention to task as well as joint attention and focus
- The child bringing items for shared enjoyment, and the presence of turn-taking between the child and the adult
- How the parent and child interact surrounding book reading: body language, emotional signals, and efforts to engage the child
- Language development:
  - Expressive: verbal (babbling, words, phrases, rhyming, spontaneous conversation), nonverbal (gestures, pointing)
  - Receptive: understanding directions, pointing to pictures
  - Pragmatic: the social context of language
  - Phonemic/Phonological awareness: ability to identify and mentally manipulate the sounds (phonemes), sound sequences, and sound structures in a syllable or word

- Atypical Language: echolalia (immediate and delayed)
- Fine motor skills:
  - Holding the book
  - Turning pages
  - Pointing
  - Tactile abilities
  - Preferences

When providing families with anticipatory guidance concerning literacy activities:

- Encourage families to balance the demands of the educational goals, therapies, and medical needs of the child with time for activities of mutual pleasure—shared reading, story-telling, playing games, and time enjoying the outside (hide and seek, going to the park).
- Encourage communication, modeling reading and writing, and building literacy-rich home environments.
- Acknowledge what parents and caretakers are already doing to promote early literacy in their children.
- Encourage adaptive approaches and tools to meet a child’s specific needs (e.g., story boxes, tactile experience books for children with vision loss, social stories for children with autism, etc.)
- Acknowledge that the child may be difficult to engage or inattentive/hyperactive and provide positive feedback to caregivers about their daily work with the child and further suggestions for interventions.

When providing families with anticipatory guidance concerning support services for their infant or child:

- For infants and toddlers identified with developmental concerns prior to three years of age, direct parents to early intervention programs for evaluation. Suggest disability-specific resources to them through which they can learn how to engage their child in language, literacy, and play activities at home.
- For children approaching their third birthday, inquire whether their parents/ caretakers and/or the Early Intervention team have contacted the special education department of their public school system and whether the child is being evaluated for preschool services.
- For children who are turning five years of age, inquire whether their parents/ caretakers have met with their child’s preschool team concerning preparation for their child’s transition to kindergarten. If the child is not attending school, they should be encouraged to register and contact the special education department of their public school system to seek an evaluation for their child to qualify for services.



# Resources for Primary Care Providers

## Healthcare Delivery and General Information on Literacy

### BOOKS

Identifying and Addressing Developmental-Behavioral Problems: A Practical Guide for Medical and Non-Medical Professionals, Trainees, Researchers and Advocates

by Frances Page Glascoe, Ph.D., Kevin P. Marks, MD, Jennifer K. Poon, MD, and Michelle M. Macias, MD (2013)

AAP Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, Second Edition

Editor: Robert G. Voigt, MD, FAAP; Associate Editors: Michelle M. Macias, MD, FAAP, Scott M. Myers, MD, FAAP, and Carl Tapia, MD, MPH, FAAP (2018)

Guide to Learning Disabilities for Primary Care: How to Screen, Identify, Manage, and Advocate for Children with Learning Disabilities

by Larry B. Silver, MD, FAACAP and Dana L. Silver, MD, FAAP (2010)

Encounters with Children: Pediatric Behavior and Development, Fourth Edition

by Suzanne D. Dixon and Martin T. Stein (2005)

Children with Disabilities, Seventh Edition

Edited by Mark Batshaw MD, Nancy Roizen MD, Gaetano Lotrecchiano, Ed.D., Ph.D. (2012)

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**WEB RESOURCES** Find all web resources at [reachoutandread.org/ddresources](http://reachoutandread.org/ddresources)

### READING TO CHILDREN

AAP Books Build Connections Toolkit

[www.aap.org/en-us/literacy/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.aap.org/en-us/literacy/Pages/default.aspx)

Reach Out and Read Literacy Resources

[www.reachoutandread.org/resource-center/](http://www.reachoutandread.org/resource-center/)

### GENERAL INFORMATION AND HEALTH SUPERVISION GUIDELINES ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

(LIMITED LIST)

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP)

[www.aacap.org](http://www.aacap.org)

American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP)

[www.aafp.org](http://www.aafp.org)

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)

[www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)

American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA)

[www.aapa.org](http://www.aapa.org)

Center for Disease Control: Developmental Disabilities

[www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/developmentaldisabilities/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/developmentaldisabilities/index.html)

National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners (NAPNAP)

[www.napnap.org](http://www.napnap.org)





# Suggested Activities

## to Encourage Literacy for All Children

### FOR INFANTS OR TODDLERS

- Cuddle your baby often. Smile and make eye contact.
- Respond to her babbles and coos—have back and forth conversations.
- Play touching and singing games with his nose, toes and tummy.
- Play peek-a-boo, patty-cake, and puppet games.
- Sing lullabies to calm her. Music builds memory and language skills.
- Point to and name objects around him.
- Clap along to the rhythm of the words in rhyming books
- Read to your toddler every day for at least 5-10 minutes.
- Include books in daily routines such as naptime and bedtime.
- Re-read her favorite stories.
- Make it easy for your toddler to reach his/her own books.
- Tell stories and sing songs and rhymes in your home language.
- Replace television and technology time with the Name Game, reading, and outdoor activities.
- Encourage the people who care for him to read and talk with him.
- Explore infant/toddler programs at your library.

### FOR PRESCHOOL OR SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

- Increase daily reading to 20-30 minutes.
- Build his listening and comprehension skills by reading books with more words and fewer pictures such as Frog and Toad or longer picture books.
- Help her to build a personal library of books.
- Bring books in the car, on the bus, to the doctor's office, and anywhere else he is required to wait.
- Use the library for free audio books for long trips.
- Have her apply for her own public library card.
- Talk about colors, numbers, letter names, and sounds on street signs, cereal boxes, T-shirts, and other things around him.
- Point to pictures and talk about them.
- Play rhyming games and word games like the Name Game.
- Even if she is starting to read, keep reading with, and to, her.
- Take turns reading to each other.
- Early reading and writing skills develop at the same time, so help him use crayons, markers, and paint to draw pictures



# Activities to Encourage Language and Literacy Development

## HOW TO READ WITH YOUR INFANT OR TODDLER

## WHAT TO READ WITH YOUR INFANT OR TODDLER

### Speech and Language Delay

- Use books that rhyme and/or repeat.
- Talk about the story to aid comprehension.

Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? by Bill Martin, Jr.  
Each Peach Pear Plum by Allan and Janet Ahlberg  
Sign and Sing-Along Series by Annie Kubler

### Developmental Delay

- Reading, rhyming, and word play are important.
- Read books about everyday activities and objects.

I Can, Can You? by Marjorie W. Pitzer  
Kids Like Me by Laura Ronay (and other titles)  
Families by Rena D. Grossman (and other titles)

### Motor Delay

- Find a way to position the child next to you.
- Use books with thick, sturdy pages.

Stroller Strap Books such as Ears, Nose & Toes  
E-Z Page Turners such as Trucks and Opposites

### Vision Loss

- Sit close together with light on the page.
- Use scratch and sniff books and those with textures, mirrors, shiny or raised objects, and black and white pictures, or audio books.
- Introduce Braille books early.

Pat the Bunny by Dorothy Kunhardt (and other Touch and Feel books)  
DK Braille: Animals (and other titles)  
How Do Dinosaurs Eat Cookies? by Jane Yolen  
Black & White by Tana Hoban

### Hearing Loss

- Make sure she can see the reader's face AND the book.
- Turning pages, touching pictures, and lifting flaps will help prepare him for sign language
- Use simple signs while speaking the story.

Sign and Sing Along Series by Annie Kubler  
Baby Signs by Joy Allen  
Meal Time by Anthony Lewis (and other titles)  
My First Book of Sign Language by Joan Holub

### Autism Spectrum Disorder

- Books with faces can help her recognize emotions.
- Reading and conversations build oral language, joint attention, and reciprocity.

Global Babies by Mara Ajmera  
Smile! by Roberta Grobel Intrater  
Feelings by Susan Canizares

### Short Attention Span, High Activity Level, or ADHD

- Read to your toddler every day for at least 5–10 minutes.
- Turn off all media to read without distraction.
- Keep reading even if he wanders off; he may still be listening.

The Itsy Bitsy Spider by Rosemary Wells  
If You're Happy and You Know It by Annie Kubler  
Ring Around a Rosie by Annie Kubler  
Row, Row, Row Your Boat by Annie Kubler

### Learning Style Differences

- No guidance is included here because Learning Style Differences are not diagnosed before preschool.



HOW TO READ WITH YOUR  
PRESCHOOL OR SCHOOL-AGE CHILD

WHAT TO READ WITH YOUR **PRESCHOOL OR  
SCHOOL-AGE CHILD**

**Speech and  
Language Delay**

- Practice letter sounds: "What sound does 'ball' start with?"
- Find words that start with the same sound, or rhyming words.

Hippos Go Berserk! by Sandra Boynton  
Mr. Brown Can Moo! Can You? by Dr. Seuss  
Does a Chimp Wear Clothes? by Fred Ehrlich

**Developmental  
Delay**

- Read books about everyday activities, such as going to bed.
- Talk about the pictures and name objects as you read.

At the Seashore by Ruth Koepfel  
The Little Engine That Could by Watty Piper  
Sounds on the Go! by Gail Donovan

**Motor Delay**

- Ask his occupational and/or physical therapist about special tools to help prop up the book.
- Find books that have buttons that make sounds.

Susan Laughs by Jeanne Willis  
Hello, Goodbye Dog by Maria Gianferrari

**Vision Loss**

- Find large print books about things she likes.
- Find audio books that he can start with a button.
- Continue with word/letter sound games.
- Present real objects from the book for children to touch and explore and talk about their features.

Mr. Brown Can Moo! Can You? by Dr. Seuss  
(use with plastic or stuffed animals)  
Books with wheels or parts that move  
The Black Book of Colors by Menena Cottin and Rosana Faría

**Hearing Loss**

- Use stuffed animals to act out the story.
- Read the same story again and again. This will help your child catch words he may have missed.

Sign Language, My First 100 Words by Michiyo Nelson  
One Trick for One Treat by Dawn Babb Prochovnic  
Splish, Splat! by Alexis Domney

**Autism Spectrum  
Disorder**

- Explore books about feelings.
- Read books on her special interests.
- Find audio books that operate with a button.

My Many Colored Days by Dr. Seuss  
Llama, Llama Mad at Mama by Anna Dewdney

**Short Attention  
Span, High  
Activity Level,  
or ADHD**

- Explore books that increase self-awareness.
- Break up short periods of reading with play time.

The Adventures of Taxi Dog by Debra Barracca  
Tyrannosaurus Wrecks! by Sudipta Bardhan-Quallen  
The Day the Teacher Went Bananas by James Howe

**Learning Style  
Differences**

- Read often and point and sound out letters.
- Choose books with simple rhymes and story lines your child will understand.
- Ask your child questions about the book to help comprehension.

LMNO Peas by Keith Baker  
Is Your Mama a Llama by Debbie Guarino  
BINGO by Rosemary Wells

## Reach Out and Read National Center

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Founded in 1989 at Boston City Hospital (now Boston Medical Center), Reach Out and Read is a national nonprofit organization that gives young children a foundation for success by incorporating books into pediatric care and encouraging families to read aloud together. Reach Out and Read currently serves 4.5 million children and their families, reaching 1 out of every 4 low-income children in the US. The Reach Out and Read network brings together 33,000 medical providers at over 6,100 program sites in all 50 states and Washington, D.C. The Reach Out and Read model is endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Reach Out and Read is a registered 501c3.



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