

# Am I Really My Child's First Teacher?

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By Nicole Taylor

You might be thinking, “I’m a parent, not a teacher.” The great news is, whether you’ve had training or not, you are your child’s first teacher.

Many simple, everyday routines are excellent opportunities for developing your child’s emergent literacy skills. Emergent literacy refers to the point in children’s development before they are able to read on their own or write words that others can read. This concept assumes that literacy learning begins at birth and develops gradually over time. It also suggests that the pre literacy skills children develop at this time are the critical foundation for later reading success. For example, by the time Lucas turns 1, his parents will have spent 8,760 hours providing him with consistent care. When Lucas is ready to start kindergarten at the age of 5, his parents will have accumulated 43,800 hours —over 1,000 days—with him, where growth and development are continuously occurring. This is a crucial period of development when it comes to liter

So what can you do? Below are three quick, yet impactful suggestions for quality literacy experiences. These ideas will help you promote literacy in a way that makes sense for you and your family.

## *Tell stories*

Language develops long before a child speaks actual words. In anticipation, we sing, talk, read, and tell stories to children. Since there is a natural progression of oral language (the ability to speak and understand language) to reading and writing, telling stories is an important step to becoming a reader. You can develop your child’s oral language through storytelling. Use your imagination, and adjust your stories to fit your family’s traditions and culture.



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## Look around

Use everyday routines and surroundings to promote a print rich environment, which is an environment that allows children to see print and words in authentic ways. For example, the kitchen is full of literacy learning opportunities: label your appliances, refrigerator drawers, and items in the pantry; follow a recipe with your child; and identify key words on food labels. But the kitchen is not the only place to create a print rich environment! Extend your labeling to other parts of the home, too. This will help your children to learn letters, words, and the purpose and meaning of printed language. Developing this understanding of print will be foundational for children. They begin to understand that words have meaning, which will be important as they begin the process of learning how to read.

## Make books available

In addition to reading, allow your child to physically explore books by making them easily accessible. Children develop emergent literacy skills by showing an interest in books—encourage your child to turn pages and pretend to read. Imitating the behavior of reading will allow your child to explore and begin to grasp the overall concept of reading. You can build on this pre-reading skill as your child will soon begin to develop an awareness for words, pictures, and the purpose for reading

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Nicole Taylor earned a PhD in Educational Psychology with a concentration in language and literacy, an MA in Language, Literacy, and Culture, and a BA in Early Childhood Education. Her research area centers around family literacy.

**Audience:** *Family*



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