



Early Learning Areas / Literacy

Print-Rich Environment (Part II)



Dear Debi,

I take care of a 4-year-old who is having trouble remembering her letters, number and colors. I created a game to help her and I think it's working; she asks for it now. As I get new children in my care what else can I do so they won't have this same kind of problem?

– **Beatriz** , San Fernando, CA

Debi's Tips



Debi Gutierrez

Host

- Use household items to point out letters, numbers and words
- Make signs, labels and charts
- Plan playful literacy experiences

Expert Advice



Magaly Lavadenz,

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Language & literacy
specialist

Having a print-rich environment is important for developing children's language skills, because they discover that there is another way to communicate—through print.

A print-rich environment helps foster skills needed for reading. Kids begin to discover cues that help them figure out words they see which lays the foundation for reading.

Finally, a print-rich environment also spurs an interest in writing. Kids want to model what they see around them and communicate in written form. If kids are in an environment that has labels, signs and charts, they will be exposed to letters, words and numbers early and make connections between the letters and the functions they serve.

Ordinary household routines and activities can be used as learning experiences for kids. This is called environmental literacy and it can be used in almost any activity. For example, when driving with kids, you can point out different signs and objects. Child Care providers can also involve kids in making their grocery shopping list.

You can do all sorts of games out of every day activities and items around the home. For example, cutting out coupons is great because it shows kids lots of different labels, letters and numbers. You can turn a walk into a learning activity by playing games such as pointing out all of the "S" words that you see on signs or store names, etc. You can also use a sand box for letter recognition. Writing out letters in the sand and erasing it is a great game that kids will enjoy and it's easy to do.

Remember, when speaking with kids, use words in the context of a sentence instead of just using singular words so that kids will also be exposed to sentence structure.

When children point out letters or begin learning to recognize words and letters, expand their understanding by putting them in context. For instance, if a boy recognizes the letter "d" because that's the first letter in his name, expand that understanding by saying, "Yes, your name starts with a D for David, but did you know that D is also in the word 'door'?"

The most important thing that child care providers can do is to model for kids. For instance, have kids watch you as you write a letter to someone, letting them fix the stamp onto the envelope and seal it. By involving them and modeling usage of letters, words and numbers, you are showing the kids how they will be using them in the future.

Remember, too, that reading to kids at least once a day is very important to having an environment that promotes letter recognition. When you read to them, they see letters and numbers and how they work.

Child Care provider Comments



Mechelle

Family child care provider for 4 years

The first thing to do is to make your child care print-rich so that the kids are in an environment that is labeled. I make sure that I label things for them and that there are plenty of books for them everywhere. I think the kids learn to connect words with their meaning through illustrations and labeling.



Alma Martinez

Child care provider for 10 years

I do some labeling in my environment, such as "chair," "door" and "window." I don't necessarily expect young children to recognize or be able to read at the age of three, but I think the mere aspect of exposing them to print is important. I also like to use pictographs. It shows them the steps they need to wash their hands, for example. I also include nametags, because I think kids learn to recognize their own names first.



Mary

Provider for 10 years

I use magnet letters with the girl I care for, she plays with them on the refrigerator and I do some labeling for her. We also do charts such as a growth chart. I think it's important to put up posters and charts so that she's exposed to as much literacy as possible.

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