

# Special Foster Care & Therapeutic Respite Care

## Tips, Tools & Resources

### Literacy Matters

One of the greatest gifts a parent can give a child is the gift of literacy, a gift that can change the course of a child's life. Children who garner literacy skills have greater success in school and are more empowered to take part in the world around them, adding their voice to the general discourse of life.

#### What is Literacy?

When you think about literacy, most people picture a person reading a book. However, literacy actually encompasses reading, writing, speaking and listening—all of which involve comprehension and meaning making.

**Reading** Reading begins at a much earlier age than most people think. Babies sitting in a parent's lap while being read to learn the marks on a page have meaning. Toddlers who do the same pick up reading skills, such as turning pages and following text from the top of the page to the bottom, from left to right. Young children who pretend to read by flipping through the pages and telling the story demonstrate they understand stories have a beginning, a middle and an end, that words have meaning and putting them together brings about comprehension. It is never too early to start reading to a child, nor too soon to have the child read to you.

**Writing** Writing is a natural inclination for many children. They see a pen or pencil and want to imitate what they watched their parents do. Often, this happens on surfaces other than paper, such as the walls! As frustrated as a parent can be to discover a child's inadvertent graffiti, the act of writing should be fostered at all ages. Just as with "pretend" reading, writing that makes no sense to the adult eye, matters to the child

author. He can read his writing even if you cannot. Long before a child can form letters or spell a word correctly, he should be encouraged to write. Long after he learns these things, his writing should be celebrated again and again.

**Listening** Parents look forward to the time a child learns the word "no," because understanding its meaning can help keep him safe. When we listen, we make meaning from the words we hear so that we can comprehend the spoken text. Listening helps us know each other. Listening gives us direction. Listening informs our very being.

**Speaking** Long before there was the written word, mankind depended on speech to frame their existence and shape their society. Although pen and paper have come along, the ability to clearly convey that which you think and feel is still paramount to success. Teachers need to reach their students. Students need to demonstrate their understanding. Professionals need to share their skill sets. Politicians need to persuade colleagues and constituents. Actors need to create new worlds for their audience. Musicians need to reach the crowd.

#### Literacy Activities

**Text is all around you** Reading does not just occur while sitting down with a book. We read signs, menus, forms, lyrics, maps, etc. Encourage your children to help you read those texts, at a restaurant, at a store, while in the car. Set a regular time everyone is reading something, be it a book, a magazine, a newspaper or a comic. Read aloud to each other. Ask your child about what he is reading. Tell him what you have read.



**Write in all seasons.** Teach your child the power of the pen. Keep dialogue journals with your children, ongoing conversations that take place only on paper. Start a family blog, where each member posts an entry each week. Send out a family newsletter to relatives, assigning sections to each member. Have your child make out the grocery list or mark entries in your checkbook. Write letters to soldiers or a pen pal in another country. Write letters to editors or politicians. Write plays/scripts/melodramas for a family night presentation. Write essays, poems, articles and stories to be placed on the family bookshelf or posted on the refrigerator or pinned to a bulletin board.

**Hone your ears.** Listen to talk radio, books on tape, or movies with the picture off and then re-tell what you have heard. Practice giving family members complex directions and see if they are followed correctly. Sit in a crowded room with your eyes closed and then report everything you heard.

**Express yourselves.** Have everyone in your family memorize something and then have a speak-off, giving points for expression, pronunciation, eye contact and accuracy. At the dinner table, have everyone tell one thing from their day, something they were thankful for or learned or liked/disliked. Pick an issue and hold mock debates, seeing who can be the most persuasive. Take turns describing something and see who is the first to figure out what it is.

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Parent Training Exercise

Why are each of the four aspects of literacy important?

List all the literacy activities you have done over the past week.

Describe three literacy activities you can promote in your home on a regular basis.

Return to your caseworker for evaluation. Accurate answers can result in a training credit of 1/2 hour.