

Family Literacy Fact Sheet

What is family literacy?

"Family literacy refers to the way parents, children, and extended family member use literacy at home and in the community. Family literacy occurs naturally during the routines of daily living and helps children and adults *get things done*." (7, p. 17)

How does family literacy affect children's literacy and learning?

Families spontaneously engage in meaningful and purposeful literacy, regardless of socioeconomic, cultural and linguistic differences. (8)

When parents are more involved and more engaged, children tend to do better academically and socially. (21)

Research provides strong evidence for the contribution parent-child interaction makes to children's literacy and language development. (23)

Mother's reading skills are strongly associated with children's reading and mathematics achievement. (16)

"The child spends 900 hours a year in school and 7,800 hours outside school. Which teacher has the bigger influence? Where is more time available for change?" (20, p. xvii)

The benefits of shared book reading "are well documented and clearly demonstrate that shared storybook reading plays an important role in the development of language skills in both preschoolers and school-aged children. In particular, shared book reading enhances language comprehension, vocabulary development, and certain elements of phonological awareness." (3, p.3)

In Canada, children whose parents often engaged in a literacy-related activity with them before they started school did better on reading achievement tests. (9)

Regardless of socio-economic background, children whose parents read books to them in their early school years had better reading test scores at age 15. The parent-child activities that seemed to make the largest difference were reading a book, talking about things done during the day, and telling stories. (12)

Parents' basic literacy and numeracy skills have a strong, positive, and significant impact on cognitive outcomes for younger and older children. (6)

How do children benefit from family literacy programs?

"A growing body of research evaluations point to the success of programs that teach parenting skills, including the establishment of home literacy habits, to promote their children's literacy development." (22, p. 2)

Family literacy programs have a significant impact on children's cognitive skills, including language, literacy, and numeracy. (4, 5)

Family literacy programs can positively affect children’s motivation, their behaviour, and their self-esteem and self-confidence. (4)

Family engagement in children’s learning has an overall positive impact on their achievement in school. (11)

Parent involvement in literacy instruction has a significant, positive impact on children’s reading acquisition. (17)

A family literacy program for immigrant families that honours both home language and English can enhance young children’s literacy development in preparation for school entry. (1)

Positive changes are observed in participating children’s achievement, school-appropriate behaviour and school attendance. (10)

How do parents benefit from family literacy programs?

“For many adult learners, family literacy programs offer a rare opportunity: space and time to forge new identities, to develop or recover literate and academic abilities, and to pursue dreams for themselves and their families.”(15, p. 178)

Benefits of family literacy programs to parents can include:

- parents learn to support their children’s learning;
- they place greater value on education and learning and gain a better understanding of school systems
- they become more interested in developing their own literacy skills
- they form social and supportive networks
- they have opportunities to progress to further education and training. (18)

Parents in a bilingual family literacy program can benefit from an increased understanding of young children’s early learning and different ways to support that learning. (1)

Parents in family literacy programs can become more comfortable at school, understand school expectations better, and be better able to support their children’s learning at home. (2)

Research suggests that family literacy programs help parents gain literacy knowledge and skills that they incorporate in daily interactions with their children. (19)

Through family literacy program participation, parents learn skills that help them develop more effective parenting strategies. (4)

Family literacy programs can provide social support for parents, particularly for women. (14)

Several large scale studies have shown that family literacy programs can enhance parents’ employment status. (13)

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