



# Learning to Grow

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

## Raising a Reader

How do you raise a reader? This has been a question that parents and caregivers have been asking for decades. The *National Early Literacy Panel Report* found that three skills strongly predict future reading achievement.

- ♥ Oral Language
- ♥ Phonological Awareness
- ♥ Alphabet Knowledge

What does this mean? Bonding with your child through songs, books, and daily interactions help to build oral language, a strong foundation for literacy. This newsletter will discuss the other two important building blocks—phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge. These important skills help to give your child the best possible start to becoming a proficient reader!

**Phonological Awareness** is the ability to hear and manipulate the parts of words and sentences such as:

- ♥ identifying rhyming words that have the same ending sound (e.g., ball/tall/wall);
- ♥ recognizing words that have the same beginning sound (e.g., ball/bent/back);
- ♥ identifying the syllables in a word (e.g., tri-cycle);
- ♥ blending and segmenting beginning and ending sounds (e.g., b-all/t-all);
- ♥ segmenting a sentence into words (e.g., This-is-my-ball).

**Alphabet Knowledge** is the ability to recognize that letters are symbols that stand for something. It is understanding that each letter has a name and makes a different sound. Children develop



alphabet knowledge when you provide them meaningful opportunities to explore letter symbols and sounds.

In this newsletter, we will discuss the developmental progression of phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge. We will also share ideas to integrate phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge into daily experiences for infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

### This newsletter includes:

- ♥ **Age-specific information and suggestions** about activities to do with your infant, toddler, or preschooler,
- ♥ **Featured activities** for each age group,
- ♥ **How This Helps:** a summary of your child's development by doing these activities together,
- ♥ **Resources:** for more information about this topic, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.

# Infants

Babies begin to develop early literacy skills as they watch, listen, and explore everything around them. By 8 months of age, infants will begin to take turns in “conversations” by listening, responding, and babbling. As they explore the world around them, they will begin to understand how objects work and that words have meaning.

*You can support phonological awareness with infants through:*

- ♥ **Self-Talk or Mirror Talk**- talking to her about what you are doing (e.g., “I am mixing your yummy poi.”) or by labeling her actions throughout the day (e.g., “You’re holding the ball.”) Talking to your child is the best way for her to hear words and connect those words to what they mean.
- ♥ **Nursery Rhymes and Songs**- singing songs with rhymes such as *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*, *Row Row Row Your Boat*, or *Humpty Dumpty*. These familiar songs often have rhymes that feature words that sound the same.



*You can support alphabet knowledge with infants by:*

- ♥ Providing different materials in a variety of textures;
- ♥ Allowing her to grasp and mouth soft books or board books.

By exploring materials and books of differing textures, babies learn about their world. As you describe the shapes and textures, you help build vocabulary and an awareness of shape and form.

## Activity for Infants: *Play with Sounds*

What You Need:

None

What to Do:

During every day routines such as feeding, diapering, and bathing:

1. Respond to the facial expressions and sounds that your baby makes. When she smiles and gurgles, smile back and talk to her. For example, “Look at that big smile! Now you’re saying ‘ooh,’ aren’t you?”
2. Copy her sounds.
3. Make silly sounds (smacking, blowing, popping) and shapes with your lips.
4. Encourage her to copy you



*(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)*

# Toddlers

Toddlers demonstrate early literacy skills as their vocabulary increases. They are able to listen and understand the meaning of some words, and may have brief conversations with others. Toddlers often enjoy listening to stories by looking and pointing at the pictures in books.

*You can support phonological awareness in toddlers by building on the infant strategies listed in this newsletter and by:*

- ♥ **Reading Rhyming Books** over and over. Through repetition, your child can finish the rhyme. For example, “Brown Bear Brown Bear what do you see? I see a Yellow Duck looking at \_\_\_\_.”
- ♥ **Making up silly sentences** using the first letter of your child’s name. For example, “Silly Sarah spilled spots on a snake!”

Calling attention to the ending sounds in rhyming books or the same initial sounds helps develop phonological awareness.

You can support alphabet knowledge in toddlers by building on the infant strategies listed in this newsletter and by:



- ♥ Exploring tactile alphabet books and singing the alphabet song;
- ♥ Providing sensory experiences with alphabets such as alphabet magnets, sandpaper letters, and letters written with sidewalk chalk.

Toddlers develop alphabet knowledge when they are able to explore alphabets through sensory experiences.

## Activity for Toddlers: *Magic Name*

What You Need:

- White crayon
- White paper
- Water color paint
- Brush

What to Do:

1. Write your child’s name using the white crayon by firmly pressing down on the paper to print each letter.
2. Show your toddler how to dip the brush in water and the water color paint.
3. As she moves her brush over the paper, say the letters that appear.
4. When she is finished, point out the letters and sounds that make up her name.

*(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)*





## Preschoolers

Preschoolers hear and play with sounds in words through singing and by playing rhyming games. They are developing an awareness that words have syllables. By age 4, they are beginning to recognize some letter symbols and the sounds that they represent. They begin to understand that print has meaning and may use emergent writing such as scribbling to represent words.

*You can support phonological awareness in preschoolers by:*

- ♥ **Rhythm and Rhyme** - Say a nursery rhyme and stomp to the rhythm together. This helps bring awareness to the ending sound of rhyming words and emphasizes words as you stomp it out.
- ♥ **Syllable Clap** - Clap out the syllables to your child's name. For example, say, "Makana has 3 syllables. Clap your name with me. Ma-ka-na!" This helps children understand that words are broken into units of sound.
- ♥ **Word Stretch** - Have your child guess which word you are saying when you stretch it out by individual sounds, emphasizing that words are made up of individual sounds. For example, say, "aaa...t." "Put it together to



make at." Start with words with 2 sounds, then work your way up to longer sounds

*You can support alphabet knowledge in preschoolers by:*

- ♥ Modeling the letter names and sounds. For example, "The letter B has a line with two bumps and is called the letter 'B'. It sounds like /b/b/b/."
- ♥ Hunting for letters by having your child find a letter in a page of a book (ensure that the print is large enough to easily spot the letter).

### Activity for Preschoolers: *Popular Pals*

What You Need:

Popular Pal cut-out (See Insert)  
Scissors  
Glue

Crayons or markers  
\*Optional: Items for decorating (e.g., yarn for hair, googly eyes, buttons, etc.)

What to Do:

1. Help your child cut out the Popular Pal cut-out found in this packet.
2. Let her decorate it using crayons or optional decorative items.
3. Help her come up with an alliterative name phrase in which the first sound is the same (e.g., "Happy Holly"). You may also use "likes" to extend the alliteration (e.g., "Happy Holly likes hamsters").
4. Write the name phrase on a strip of paper and display it with the decorated cut out.

*(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)*



## How This Helps

The activities suggested in this newsletter help promote many different aspects of development:

### Physical Development

- ♥ Learn to use her body with intention
- ♥ Develop eye-hand coordination

### Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Build trust in you and other important people
- ♥ Feel important and good about herself

### Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Build verbal skills, vocabulary, and use of descriptive language
- ♥ Learn to ask and answer questions

### Cognitive Development

- ♥ Develop her creativity and imagination
- ♥ Develop her thinking and problem-solving skills



## Kids in the Kitchen

Cooking teaches valuable lessons such as math (quantities, measurement), science (how matter changes), fine motor (stirring, pouring), and literacy (print awareness). As you make this recipe with your child, talk about kitchen safety. Show her how to handle items safely and allow her to do as much as she is capable of. Praise her efforts, and ask questions throughout the process to encourage her thinking skills. Most of all, have fun!

### Ono Overnight Oats

Adapted from: <https://www.superhealthykids.com/recipes/banana-bread-overnight-oats/>

Ingredients:

- |                              |                               |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 1/2 medium bananas         | 2/3 cup milk                  |
| 2/3 cup oats, dry            | 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon         |
| 1/2 cup Greek yogurt, plain  | 2 tablespoons pecans, chopped |
| 1 1/2 tablespoons chia seeds |                               |



Directions:

1. Have your child mash 1 banana with a fork in a large bowl. Say, "We are making overnight oats. That starts with the same sound /o/."
2. Add the oats, yogurt, chia seeds, milk, and cinnamon.
3. Have your child stir everything together and chant "Overnight Oats O-O-O!"
4. Pour mixture into two half-pint (1-cup) canning jars. Cover and refrigerate overnight.
5. Cut half of a banana into slices and top each jar with some of the banana slices and 1 tablespoon of chopped pecans. Enjoy!

## Resources

### *Cox Campus*

<https://www.coxcampus.org/families/>

This free research-backed resource provides caregivers with articles, videos, and activities to support their child's learning – from infancy to literacy.

### *Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center*

*"How Parents and Families Support Phonological Awareness"*

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/big5-strategies-parents-families-phonological-awareness-eng.pdf>

Discover strategies to help develop the key skills that infants, toddlers, and preschoolers will need for their later reading success.



## Suggested Books

Discover these books and more at the **Hawai'i State Public Library** [www.librarieshawaii.org](http://www.librarieshawaii.org).

### Infants and Toddlers

*Can You Say It, Too? Tweet! Tweet!* by Nosy Crow

This interactive lift-the-flap book shows different birds and the sounds they make. The simple text makes it the perfect first book for imitating sounds.

*Are You a Cow?* By Sandra Boynton

A wacky chicken narrates this hilarious rhyming story. As readers answer the chicken's questions, they'll gain animal recognition skills as well as the importance of being ourselves.

### Preschoolers

*Some Smug Slug* By Pamela Duncan Edwards

This alliterative tale about a slug who must climb a slippery slope will have children laughing out loud as they listen to the initial sounds of words in the story. Don't forget to look for the hidden "S" on every page!

*Eating the Alphabet* by Lois Ehlert

A deliciously fun alphabet book featuring fruits and vegetables from around the world. This is the perfect book for preschoolers learning upper- and lowercase letters while learning about a mouth-watering arrangement of foods.



**Learning to Grow** is a project of the University of Hawai'i, Windward Community College, with funding from the Hawai'i Department of Human Services. Visit our website at [www.learningtogrowhawaii.org](http://www.learningtogrowhawaii.org) or visit us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/learningtogrowhawaii](https://www.facebook.com/learningtogrowhawaii)