

# How to encourage literacy in young children

In an increasingly technological world, bedtime stories are more important than ever, say child literacy experts.

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Barbara Turnbull, Toronto Star, January 27, 2014

In an increasingly technological world, good-old fashioned bedtime stories are still among the best ways to bolster a child's reading skills, say literacy experts.

And daily reading, in many forms, is essential to building a good foundation for literacy.

"Particularly at bedtime," says Gillian Mason, president of [ABC Life Literacy Canada](#), a non-profit organization that helps Canadians increase their literacy skills. "A child who's read to everyday at that time develops literacy skills from the get-go that are life-changing."

Common activities such as playing board games and cooking enhance those skills, Mason adds. Figuring out rules and following recipes helps kids practise reading, math and language, and teaches them how to follow directions.

Singing and rhyming boost literacy as well.

"We encourage 15 minutes of fun a day for families to learn together," Mason says, whose group established Family Literacy Day in 1999. The national awareness initiative is held every year on Jan. 27.

The key is to make reading at home an enjoyable, distraction-free experience that's part of the family culture, says Jo Altilia, executive director of [Literature from Life](#), a charity that holds book circles for teen mothers.

Children become comfortable handling books if they have plenty in the house. Parents should let kids select what to read together and discuss the stories — ask them to predict what happens next and compare them to other books, she suggests.

If parents follow the words with a finger, the child can connect the sound of the letters with the word and its construction.

A critical element is to model good behaviour by reading yourself, Altilia says. "(The moms) say that because they are reading, their kids are more interested in reading," Altilia says.

On its website, ABC Life Literacy Canada has a list of easy, inexpensive activities parents can do at home.

One popular project is constructing a family tree. "Kids are curious about their past and parents often haven't thought through where they come from," Mason says.

Creating a family comic strip or graphic novel is another fun endeavour, she suggests. Drawing and inserting speech through thought bubbles or captions can be deceptively stimulating.

## **Bedtime Stories**

“These are all things that don’t require a lot of resources and families can sit down and do together and keep everybody’s literacy skills sharp,” Mason says.