

Section 2: What works?

Key Messages for Professionals

Literacy is one of the most important foundations for success in school and life. It is a crucial survival tool in a global society

Literacy promotion refers to activities that will promote children's eventual ability to read and write printed text. Emergent literacy refers to the skills, knowledge and attitudes that come before and lay the foundations for conventional forms of reading and writing.

Children raised in disadvantaged families are at greater risk of developing inadequate emergent literacy skills in early childhood. A poor foundation in literacy prior to school entry reduces the likelihood of success in subsequent acquisition of literacy skills and increases the risk of disengagement from formal education and poorer life outcomes.

Nearly 30% of students in Years 3 and 5 fail to meet appropriate reading standards, and Indigenous students are three times less likely to reach the Year 5 reading benchmark than Australian students as a whole.

The knowledge, experience and skills that children bring to school is a key factor in literacy success. The home environment is recognised as critically important in promoting literacy development. Further research is needed to link literacy promotion programs conclusively with improvements in literacy and to evaluate the effectiveness of literacy promotion programs in a community or population setting.

Research-based strategies for promoting literacy

- Encourage parents to read to children as part of daily routine.
- Support parents to engage in literacy-related activities and read aloud to children regularly in ways that are enjoyable and engaging. Parents are ideal facilitators of early literacy acquisition.
- Advise parents to give children ample access to books and materials using the alphabet (for example, books, blocks, fridge magnets, mobiles and crayons and paper).
- Encourage regular library visits and help parents to appreciate the value to their child of increasing their own exposure to print.
- Share ideas for activities. Encourage parents to sing nursery rhymes and play eye spy and other games that support emergent literacy. More importantly support parents to read aloud to children in ways that encourage the child to become the storyteller over time, praise the child's efforts, point to text while reading, label objects in the book and prompt the child with questions (dialogic reading style).
- Books containing the alphabet and books with predictable or patterned content are recommended as assisting later reading achievement.