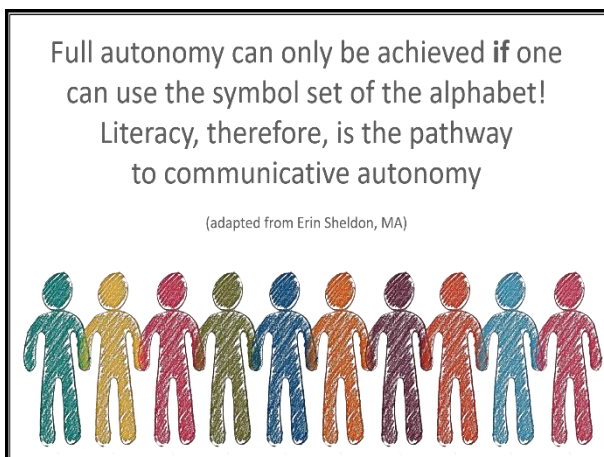
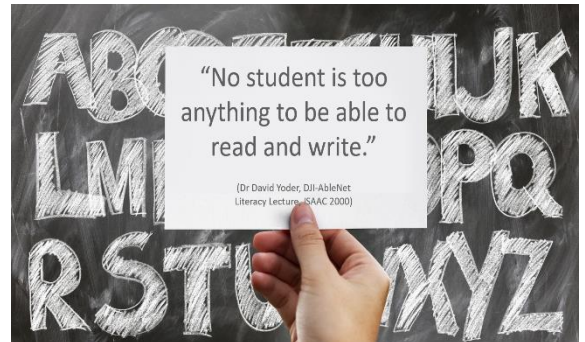


Supporting Literacy at Home: Why? & How?

Literacy, viewed here as the ability to create and comprehend text, is a key skill for living in today's society. Whilst school plays an important part in developing literacy skills, backing this up at home is important for supporting that development and for ensuring children learn to understand the value of literacy. We need to believe that every child can learn, and offer many opportunities for experiences with literacy. This is a shared responsibility with families, caregivers, educators and therapists all playing a role.



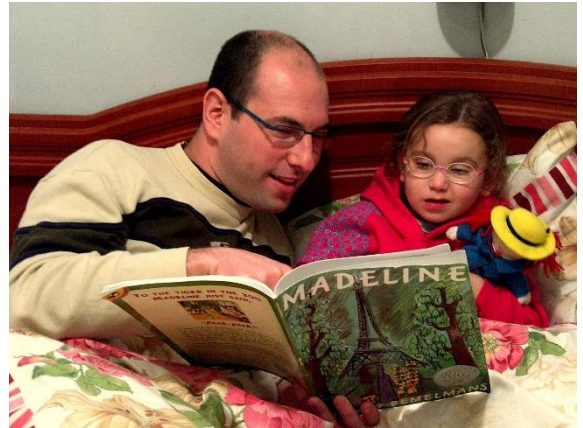
For children with complex communication needs who are using augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems, literacy may be even more important. Why? Firstly, users of AAC are essentially composing for communication (Blackstone, 1989; Koppenhaver, 2000). In fact, Clendon (2006) suggests that using AAC to communicate may be more akin to writing than to speaking. Secondly, learning to use the alphabet enables AAC users to “communicate their thoughts with as much precision as needed or desired” (Koppenhaver & Williams, 2010, p. 158). For AAC users to become autonomous communicators, not always reliant on others to think about what words they might want to use and program those into their device, the ability to spell using the alphabet is key. Many competent, effective users of AAC move flexibly between pre-programmed words, spelling and word prediction for communication.

Think about how you can build some of the following ideas into your family activities to help support your child's (children's) literacy skill development. Note that many of these are things you will be doing already, but is your child involved, or even aware of them? If not, how might you support him/her to participate in these literacy-based activities?

- **Reading:**

- Shared reading of books, poems etc. – lots of conversation about what's happening in the story and how it relates to our own experiences. Bedtime stories – child may choose the same story frequently. Read together and build the love of engaging with text.

- Articles in the newspaper or in magazines. Even the junk mail can be good to read. Talk about how these things can provide us with important or useful information.
- Cards, texts, emails from family members etc. These provide great opportunity to write in response!
- Recipes; rules for new games; instructions for new toys, technology, kit sets etc.
- Taking time out to read (or interact with text) quietly, independently – if you are reading on a device (iPad, Kindle etc.) make sure children know that is what you are doing.



- **Writing (always with access to full alphabet and for a purpose)**

- Shopping lists and reminder notes – make sure children understand the importance of these texts.
- Allow children to add their own 'writing' to cards, emails, messages and encourage receivers to respond to them.
- Have children 'write' their name on new belongings. They may use an alternate pencil (see this [Tip of the Month](#) for information on alternate pencils) or may just make a mark – you can then model how you would write their name, using their pencil.



- **Alphabet Knowledge and Phonological Awareness**

- Share tongue twisters, rhymes, riddles etc.
- Read rhyming books and poems.
- Use games like "I Spy", Letter based Treasure Hunts, Scrabble, Scattegories and more.
- Play with letter blocks, magnetic letters, cut letters out of magazines etc.
- Make letters from playdough – or make real biscuits in letter shapes.
- Make and share personally meaningful alphabet books.
- When giving choices have the child respond by giving the initial letter (e.g., "for a snack would you like B for banana or Y for yoghurt" show/write the letters as you ask and have the child select the letter for the snack they prefer).



Some children may have physical, sensory, vision, auditory or other issues that may require materials to be adapted to support their access to them. Here are some ideas:

- **Adaptations to support reading:**

- Page fluffers/page turners – help children with impaired motor skills to turn pages. These two videos provide some examples:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGJPHYkAIRU>



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-26egmV56A>



(for more page fluffer ideas, visit <http://atclassroom.blogspot.com/2010/07/page-fluffing.html> or <http://praacticalaac.org/praactical/5-ways-to-make-page-fluffers-and-spacers/>).

- Adapt young children's cardboard books by sticking your own story to the pages – great for sensory input and for children who are exploring books by mouthing or trying to rip them etc.
 - Personalise books to include favourite characters or people.
 - Laminate or use waterproof or rip-proof paper.
 - Reduce clutter on each page, increase contrast, increase font size.
 - Add tactile elements to books (<http://www.pathstoliteracy.org/blog/tactile-books-students-visual-impairments> or <https://www.med.unc.edu/ahs/clds/resources/deaf-blind-model-classroom-resources/tactual-book-kit-directions/>) or make books interesting to hold. Try [Squishy Books](#) or look at the ideas [here](#) for novel materials to make books from.
 - Use digital books with or without read aloud capability – minimise the flashy elements so that focus remains on the text. For some children the text to speech voices may be easier to understand or focus on.
 - Look for read alouds (ideally ones that show the text as they are read) on YouTube etc., or make your own videos – have a favourite family member or friend read for the video.
 - Reduce the demand for the child to look and listen at the same time – let them look first, then read and discuss. For some children looking and listening at the same time is hard.
 - Consider sensory needs – e.g., provide an enclosed space or weighted blanket, or encourage child to hang or swing as they read.
- **Adaptations for writing**
 - Using an [alternate pencil](#).
 - Using a variety of writing surfaces placed at different angles (e.g., writing on an upright whiteboard, or with chalk on a path).

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