

Section A – Introduction

The first section of this manual is an overview of **Get Set Learn**. This section includes:

- What is **Get Set Learn**? (A History)
- For Whom is the Program Designed?
- What does each Session Include?
- Mission Statement
- Underlying Principles of **Get Set Learn**
- Curriculum Outcomes of **Get Set Learn**
- Principles of Adult Education
- Principles of Emergent Literacy
- Realistic Expectations for Preschoolers
- Stages of Literacy Development

This section is designed to give you the background knowledge necessary to determine if **Get Set Learn** is the family literacy program that would best suit the needs of your clients.

What is **Get Set Learn**?

Get Set Learn is a family literacy program that focuses on both parents and their children. Three Key Messages are stressed in this program:

- Read with your child daily (read daily)
- Playing with your children in ways that are literacy and math-rich will enhance their learning (engage in literacy play)
- Let your child see you using reading, writing, and math skills in every day life (be a literacy role model)

Get Set Learn (GSL) consists of an 8-week session featuring two classes per week. Each class lasts 2 hours and is divided into a family part as well as a parents only and children only part. Each session of **GSL** has a total of 32 hours.

Get Set Learn was developed in 2003 to give parents with low literacy skills on Ontario Works (OW), tools and strategies to enable them to help their children succeed in school. This program was and is still sponsored by the municipal government (Region of Waterloo, Income Supports Division). Caseworkers from the Region of Waterloo, Income Supports Division found that parents on OW had many barriers to attending a literacy class, the least of which was child care so they sponsored **GSL** in hopes of getting these parents out of their homes and into a program. The caseworkers hoped that not only would the OW parents be given tools and strategies to help their children be successful in school, but also that these parents would either attend another literacy program following **GSL**, or have the confidence and skill to become employed.

Three Key Messages Summary

1. Read daily
2. Engage in literacy play
3. Be a literacy role model

This program recognizes that parents are their child's first teacher. In order to help a child improve his or her literacy skills, the parent must be comfortable with his or her own literacy skills. Using dialogue and applying learning to concrete situations are two strategies used to provide an interactive, nurturing and welcoming learning environment for all participants. The participant's prior knowledge is not discounted but rather is built upon in order to enhance each of the learning opportunities.

Get Set Learn is able to include the best of both worlds by combining two different methods of running a family literacy program. It has both parent and child together time (PACT) and separate parent and child time. This provides opportunities for parents to learn the strategies and tools to enhance their children's learning and then they are given "guided practice" with their children in order to experience these strategies.

Family literacy is about the many ways families use literacy and language to do everyday tasks (OLC, 2005). Research stresses that by improving the literacy skills of the parent, the child is more likely to have higher literacy skills. **GSL** builds upon the strengths already present in the families by affirming what they already do and by helping the families extend their repertoire of strategies. **GSL** recognizes and celebrates that families are unique.

GSL is designed to provide a safe, nurturing, learning environment so that families from different backgrounds, with their varying levels of literacy and math skills, are respected and can contribute to the class (prior knowledge). The activities and exploration of the books and toys are developed to enhance children and parents' natural curiosity of language and math relationships in their every day world. Parents are encouraged to play in literacy and math-rich ways in order to increase their children's understanding of math and language concepts. Then, connections to early school experiences and real world activities are made.

For Whom is the Program Designed?

Because parents are a child's first teacher, family literacy programs focus not only on the child, but primarily on the parent. The main reason for focusing on both the parent and the child is because education programs that utilize parent participation increase the child's chances of success (Nickse, 1990). Research shows that children develop vital thinking skills, attitudes, and knowledge between birth and the time they start school that lays the foundation for their school success and future lifelong learning (Mustard and McCain, 1999). **Get Set Learn** targets parents with low literacy and math skills and those who face multiple barriers. These parents would be the least likely to have access to resources such as adequate food supply, safe and secure housing, stable family support systems, monetary resources, literacy tools, etc.

Get Set Learn uses a dialogic process that allows participants who have limited reading capabilities a chance to be successful. The facilitator reads or has volunteers read small sections of the text and then everyone is encouraged to discuss and share their knowledge and experience with the group (Suda, 2001). Most information that is in written form is read aloud to all participants before having them read it on their own. Participants are encouraged to ask for assistance if needed.

Another component of **Get Set Learn** is homework for the child and parent to work on together. This allows for sharing the fun of learning at home. It also strengthens the skills learned in class by having the family practice the learning skills at home. The homework ranges from doing a craft together to having the parent work with the child on his/her number book. When parents model positive attitudes toward learning, when they read with their child and provide opportunities for learning in daily life, they are setting the stage for essential child brain development and future success in school (Jay, 2003).

Because the program promotes parents as their child's first and most important teachers, parents discover new ideas for strengthening and enhancing their child's math, reading, writing, and speaking skills as well as their own. Additionally, they learn many fun ways to make everyday tasks more literacy and math-rich. They learn that they are not only their child's favourite toy but also that there are many benefits to playing with their children.

"Low literacy often appears as a cycle within families. Since the parents don't read and write well, they don't carry out the kinds of activities with their young children that foster reading and writing. They don't have a model passed down by their own parents for building literacy skills" (Paul, 2002). Even parents with low literacy skills can be shown ways to encourage reading, writing, and math in their own children. **Get Set Learn** provides many ways for parents to incorporate these activities into their daily lives.

At Project READ, our specific target group for **GSL** is welfare parents. We target this clientele because almost one-third of working age Canadians at the lowest levels of literacy have household incomes of less than \$15,000 per year (Project READ, 2003). "The lower one's socioeconomic status, the lower the rate of participation in any type of formal learning activity" (Statistics Canada, 1997). This clearly demonstrates that the adults who need to participate in literacy programs are not accessing the programs. With **GSL**, we attempt to make it as easy as possible for OW clients to access the programs.

Finally, a family literacy approach recognizes the interconnectedness of literacy with other issues affecting families and it encourages cross-community collaborations that build on existing programs. **GSL** programs are offered in places where families already gather such as community centres, Early Years Centres, and housing units.

What Does Each Get Set Learn Session Include?

Get Set Learn sessions are two hours in length. They can be run in one of two ways.

Get Set Learn Class, Sample Template A PACT First, Then Parents and Child Separate Time

Time Required	Activity
10 minutes	Welcome, introductions, and opening activity
45 minutes	<p>Family Learning (Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time)</p> <p>Opening Routine</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hello song with puppet • ABC song • Take up homework from class before <p>PACT Activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finger play introduction and practice • Literacy and/or Math activity i.e. shape walk <p>Read Book to Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss title, author, type of print, pictures • Questions regarding prediction of what is going to happen in the book? How do you know? Why do you think that it will happen? Were you correct? Why or why not? <p>Kit Exploration by parents and their children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage families to explore the contents of the kit <p>Closing Routine</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Snack • Goodbye song
5 minutes	Children are taken to child care room (s)
55 minutes	<p>Parent Learning Time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce topic • Link topic to theme in PACT time; this may not be until the next class. Please note that the topic is introduced in the parent portion and then revisited in the PACT time the next class for implementation (the only disadvantage of this model) • Parents do activity, watch video, discussion • Refer the parents to the corresponding page (s) in the parent book
5 minutes	<p>Homework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute and explain craft • Number book for child and parent homework

Get Set Learn Class, Sample Template B
Parents and Child Separate Time First, Then PACT

Time Required	Activity
15 minutes	Opening Activity following parents settling children in child care rooms
55 minutes	Parent Learning Time <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce topic • Link topic to theme in PACT time • Parents do activity, watch video, discussion • Refer the parents to the corresponding page(s) in the parent book
5 minutes	Homework <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute and explain craft • Number book for child and parent homework
45 minutes	Family Learning (PACT Time) Opening Routine <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hello song with puppet • ABC song • Take up homework from class before PACT Activity and Snack (Please note that snack can either be done here or in the closing routine) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finger play introduction and practice • Literacy and/or Math activity i.e. shape walk Read Book to Group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss title, author, type of print, pictures • Questions regarding prediction of what is going to happen in the book? How do you know? Why do you think that it will happen? Were you correct? Why or why not? Kit Exploration by parents and their children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage families to explore the contents of the kit Closing Routine <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Snack • Goodbye song

Positive role modeling by both parents and facilitators to include healthy snacks as a daily plan is another component of **GSL**. Tips for snacks will appear in section B, called Ready, Set Go.

Mission Statement of Get Set Learn

Get Set Learn is a holistic family literacy program that provides a foundation for families with literacy challenges to experience successful lifelong learning.

Underlying Principles of Get Set Learn

1. **Get Set Learn** enables parents to understand that they are the child's first and most important teacher.
2. **Get Set Learn** provides an interactive, nurturing and welcoming learning environment.
3. **Get Set Learn** acknowledges and builds on the strengths of families.

Curriculum Outcomes of Get Set Learn

The focus of **GSL** starts with the child and moves to include the parent's needs. By the latter half of the classes, the focus is primarily on the parent's needs, skills and future goals.

1. Give parents tools to become their child's first and most important teacher
2. Help parents become work and/or education ready
3. Help families engage in literacy/math activities on a regular basis
4. Make families "school ready" for their children's entrance to school
5. Build and strengthen networks for parents, children, and Project Read Literacy Network that will continue beyond the program which will instill self-esteem, coping, parenting, literacy, communication, and assist in alleviating isolation (geographic and social)
6. Model positive/proactive parenting practices (discipline, sleeping, nutrition, etc.)
7. Translate the school system (including literacy and math) into terms that parents and children can understand
8. Help parents advocate for self and child

Curriculum Outcomes Summary

1. Give parents tools
2. Parents become work or education ready
3. Families engage in literacy and math activities
4. Children and parents become school ready
5. Build and strengthen networks
6. Model positive parenting
7. Translate the school system
8. Parents advocate for self and child



Principles of Adult Education

Malcolm Knowles was the first to describe the five main things to consider when helping adults to learn:

1. Let the adult students know why something is important to learn
2. Show the students how to direct themselves through education
3. Relate the topic to their previous experiences (i.e. Use their prior knowledge)
4. Ensure the adult students are ready and motivated to learn because people will not learn until they are ready
5. Help the adult student to overcome inhibitions, behaviours, and beliefs about learning

Principles of Emergent Literacy

Emergent literacy is a term used to describe the start of oral and written language. The principles of emergent literacy include:

1. Literacy is a social process occurring in interactions with other children and adults
2. Literacy begins at birth and includes a child's first uses of senses such as observing behaviours, hearing sounds, and learning social cues
3. All aspects of literacy including reading, writing, thinking, speaking, and listening develop independently of each other
4. Literacy develops along a continuum from beginning to mastery

Realistic Expectations for Preschoolers

Every child is unique and thus develops at his or her own pace. There are general expectations for stage-related accomplishments; not necessarily age-related. Keep in mind the ages are very general and one should not hold-fast to them. It is better to keep in mind that these accomplishments will occur in order because literacy skills develop along a continuum.



Birth to 3 years old

- Likes to suck on and hold books (very multi-sensory) - infants
- Pretends to read books
- Understands that books are handled in a specific manner
- Shows enjoyment of rhyming language and nonsense words
- Listens to stories, but doesn't necessarily sit still to listen for a long time (has some attention span)
- Has a favourite book or video
- Uses increasingly purposeful scribbling
- Begins to show attention to specific print such as letters in own name, familiar with some environmental print
- Can sometimes recognize that numbers are different from letters
- Produces some letter-like forms



3 to 4 years old

- Knows that alphabet letters are a special category that have specific names
- Recognizes more environmental print
- Recognizes repeating sounds in language e.g. Tom, Tom the Piper's Son
- Uses new vocabulary and grammar in her/his own speech
- Understands and follows oral directions
- Shows an interest in books and reading
- Has an increasing attention span and can sit for longer books
- Starts to print letters, especially first initial of name
- Identifies alphabet letters, especially from own name, Mommy or Daddy or other familiar words
- Writes (scribbles) messages



5 years old

- Knows favourite books from memory
- Begins to track print when listening to a familiar book
- Reads familiar texts
- Can print name
- Knows numbers 1 through 10 and can print some of them
- Recognizes both upper and lower case letters
- Understands the sequence of numbers and letters
- Recognizes some sight words



Stages of Literacy Development

Stages of Development	Skills Needed to Acquire and Master
<p>Getting Ready</p> <p>Listening Falling in love with sounds</p>	<p>Remembering things you have heard Understanding things you have heard</p>
<p>Understanding</p> <p>Acting and recreating stories Answering multi-level questions</p>	<p>Developing language skills Developing an understanding of concepts Being able to think critically</p>
<p>Developing Oral Language</p> <p>Extending vocabulary Matching words to thought and actions</p>	<p>Developing language skills Understanding things you have heard</p>
<p>Understanding Print</p> <p>Understanding how print is placed on page Recognizing how print works together Putting thoughts on paper</p>	<p>Understanding things you see Remembering things you see Physical coordination to be able to write Developing an understanding of concepts of writing</p>
<p>Acquiring Reading Skills</p> <p>Reading text that can be predicted Recognizing sight words Developing phonological awareness</p>	<p>Remembering things you have heard Understanding things you have heard Understanding things you see Remembering things you see Having an understanding of concepts of reading Development of language skills Critical thinking skills</p>

As children practice using language, they need to receive feedback and need time to reflect. Children need time to experience language and the time to practise and evaluate what they have experienced. This is how their language skills will develop and grow (Schiller, 2001).