



## Literacy and Families

*The homes of poor undereducated families often have many rich literacy practices and supportive family values however those adults with low literacy skills have less economic security. This affects the environment that children need for learning. Literacy supports healthy family development and vice versa.*

**📖 Early literacy skills are the foundation for future learning.** Current research shows that early experiences help to determine brain structure which in turn shapes the way we learn, think, behave and respond to challenges for the rest of our lives. The skills and capacity to learn that we develop before the age of 6 stay with us for a lifetime.

**📖 Parents with higher literacy skills have greater economic security which contributes to healthy child development.** Adults with low literacy are more likely to be unemployed, work in lower paying jobs and live in low-income households. Children of parents who have not graduated from high school are twice as likely to live in poverty as those whose parents graduated. (source: National Centre for Children in Poverty, 1992) In this environment children have many barriers and disadvantages. Parents with more education are better prepared to stay healthy, get and keep a job to become economically self-sufficient and adapt to life's changes. These capabilities benefit their children as well.

**📖 Family poverty and low literacy have a negative impact on a child's readiness to learn at school.** The children of more highly educated mothers are better prepared with knowledge, oral language and literacy skills when they enter formal schooling. (source: Functional Context Education, Dr. Thomas Sticht, 1997 at: <http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/context/cover.htm>) Children of less literate parents are more likely to have developmental delays and behavioural issues that negatively affect school readiness. (source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1994) They also have drop out rates twice as high as for other children. Studies show that middle class children enter first grade having experienced an average of 1000-1700 hours of storybook reading in the home, compared with 25 hours for children from very low-income homes (source: Let's Talk About Literacy, Literacy Partners of Manitoba, 1999.) Less literate parents may also not have the information, confidence, or skills to confront the school system to help their children.

 **Literacy and educational achievement often continue from generation to generation.** One should be careful not to blame people with limited literacy for their lifestyle and health practices since low literacy limits informed choices, resources and the control which people have over their lives as well as their children's. Participation in family literacy is strongly linked to scholastic achievement among children and to adults' success in finding and keeping employment. Not only do family literacy programs emphasize the enjoyment of literacy for both parents and children, they also influence broader growth and development in society as a whole.

### **What you can do!**

- **Set a positive example!** Demonstrate to children the meaningful uses of reading, writing, language and numeracy in accomplishing day-to-day tasks. If literacy has a valued place in the home, both children adults are more likely to adopt and maintain good literacy habits.
- **Support family literacy programs.** Family literacy programs recognize and support the influence of the family on the literacy development of all its members. Every dollar spent on family and intergenerational literacy programs does “double duty” supporting early childhood development as well as adult basic education. A study in Nova Scotia showed that adults stay enrolled in family literacy programs longer than in most adult-only programs. Their attendance rate is also higher. Furthermore, American longitudinal research with 2000 families that attended family literacy programs showed that literacy intervention reduced participants' full dependence on public assistance from 67% to 11% (National Center for Family Literacy).
- **Reduce inequality.** Fighting poverty pays off in improved literacy development for parents and children, as well as improved health, safer communities and a more cohesive society.
- **Get involved in the annual Family Literacy Day, held each year on January 27<sup>th</sup>** Find out how your community is celebrating with events and activities. Get involved, join in or start your own events to promote awareness of this important issue.

### **Suggested *Family Literacy* Resources**

- ✓ **ABC Canada** prepares promotion and support materials for Family Literacy Day on January 27<sup>th</sup> each year. Contact tel: 1-800-303-1004 or [www.abc-canada.org](http://www.abc-canada.org)
- ✓ **The Association of Family Resource Programs (FRP Canada)** has developed many materials to encourage early literacy activities. They also worked with MCL to develop a series of 5 guides called *Weaving Literacy into Family and Community Life*. Contact FRP Canada at 613-237-7667 or at [www.frp.ca](http://www.frp.ca)
- ✓ **Basic Skills Agency** is the national development organization of literacy and numeracy in England and Wales, and has developed a range of family literacy programs and resource materials. Website at: [www.basic-skills.co.uk](http://www.basic-skills.co.uk)
- ✓ **The Centre for Family Literacy**, tel: 780-421-7323 or at [www.familit.ca](http://www.familit.ca)
- ✓ **Family Literacy Association of Nova Scotia**, tel: 902-485-1635 or [www.nald.ca/FLANS.htm](http://www.nald.ca/FLANS.htm)

- ✓ **Family Literacy Resource Notebook** at <http://literacy.kent.edu/Oasis/famlitnotebook/>
- ✓ **The Hanen Centre** has family-focused early language intervention programs and learning resources for parents and professional, tel: 416-921-1073 or online at: [www.hanen.org](http://www.hanen.org)
- ✓ **Parents as Teachers**, an international early childhood parent education and family support program. Check their website at [www.patnc.org](http://www.patnc.org)
- ✓ **Storysacks program**, website at [www.storysacks.nald.ca](http://www.storysacks.nald.ca)
- ✓ **Zero to Three**, a US non-profit agency dedicated to advancing the healthy development of babies and young children. Information and professionals on the website at [www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)