

# The power of family literacy

## What is family literacy?

*An innovative educational approach with a powerful premise: parents are their children's first and most important teachers.*

Family literacy draws its power from a crucial insight: efforts to improve the literacy and school-readiness of young children need to acknowledge the very strong influence of parental literacy skills. There is little point in recommending that parents read with their children and support their learning when many parents do not themselves have the literacy skills to equip them for this role. 40% of British Columbian adults do not have sufficient literacy skills to fully participate and succeed in the modern, knowledge-based economy, and 14% are at the lowest skill level where they struggle to cope with basic printed materials.

Unless we help parents as well as children develop their skills, the familiar intergenerational cycle of low literacy – and the related intergenerational correlations between education level, income, health and other critical outcomes – will persist. Family literacy programs present a solution that builds the skills of parents and children together.

Family literacy embraces the intergenerational sharing of experiences and meanings that enhances the development of language and numeracy skills. It regards the family as a learning unit, and provides integrated support and learning opportunities for all family members. Programs build on existing community resources, and combine the strengths of many partners.

Given the diversity of families, programs and materials, the term “family literacy” can be used to mean different things by different people. Family literacy acknowledges the richness and complexity of families and the multiple, often-unrecognized literacy tasks that are part of every day life. It is culturally responsive and as diverse as the communities in which it develops.

Family literacy happens naturally, at home (reading a story together, writing a letter, cooking to a recipe) or in structured programs that can be home- or centre-based (libraries, schools, family resource programs, health centres, workplaces, community centres, childcare settings).



1-888-732-3234  
toll-free in BC  
[www.literacybc.ca](http://www.literacybc.ca)

## How Literacy BC supports Family Literacy

Literacy BC is the lead provincial organization responsible for family literacy development and coordination. We provide:

- awareness-raising and leadership
- training for family literacy practitioners
- program development consultation services
- information and referrals
- resources and materials through our Resource Centre
- networking and electronic conferencing
- development & dissemination of proven practices & standards

We organise BC's Family Literacy Week in January every year. We are a partner in the innovative Family Literacy Certificate offered through Vancouver Community College. We build partnerships with government, education boards, Literacy Now communities, and the many champions of family literacy in the private sector.

## How you can help

- Read with your children
- Participate in your local family literacy program
- Volunteer for your local family literacy program
- Call Literacy BC to find out what it would take to start a program for your community
- Ask your elected representative what he or she is doing to support and develop family literacy
- Donate to Literacy BC to support family literacy

Literacy BC is the registered not-for-profit organization promoting and supporting literacy and lifelong learning in British Columbia since 1989:

- supporting adult learners and their families
- promoting innovation in practice
- raising public awareness
- building capacity
- partnering in policy development

Contact us at 1-888-READ-234 or visit our website at [www.literacybc.ca](http://www.literacybc.ca) to find sources for information presented here, get more details on family literacy activity in BC, make use of our resources, find out about starting a family literacy program, or to make a simple and secure online donation.

Looking for a family literacy program?

visit [www.literacybc.ca/directory](http://www.literacybc.ca/directory)

# Family Literacy works for BC

## Power of family literacy

Many people with low literacy start to think about improving their skills when their children reach reading age. They want to be able to help their children learn. Family literacy programs meet this need, offering a way to reach adults who may not be engaged by other learning opportunities.

Busy parents often cannot find the time – or afford childcare – to be able to attend educational programs. By enabling families to learn together, family literacy fits the reality of families' lives and allows more people to participate. So it is not surprising that parents are far more likely to persist in family literacy than in other types of adult learning programs.

Children do better when parents are involved. They acquire their basic cognitive, linguistic and social skills in the context of the family. School achievement improves with increased parental involvement. And without family engagement, interventions are much less likely to be effective or lasting.

It is because family literacy addresses so many issues simultaneously that it has proven so effective at achieving its goals:

- promote reading and learning as valued family activities that encourage positive interactions and shared experiences
- enhance the ability of parents to support their children's literacy development, from birth throughout the school years
- support parents in the challenging and critical job of nurturing children who will become successful adults and citizens
- create an opportunity for parents to pursue their own educational goals
- offer children developmentally appropriate learning that supports school readiness
- promote and support lifelong learning

## Literacy begins at home

- Children raised in literate households are likely to enter grade one with several thousand hours of one to one pre-reading experience.
- Children stand a better chance of becoming fully literate adults if reading is encouraged in the home.
- Improving parents' skills directly and positively affects the language development of children.
- Quality of life for families, including income levels and employment status, is directly related to the literacy levels of parents.
- Without crucial parental support, cycles of under-education persist from generation to generation. With support from family literacy programs, children who might otherwise have been educationally and developmentally behind their peers enter school on par.
- School readiness is influenced by parents' level of education. The higher the level, the more likely the child will go on to succeed in school.
- If we want our intervention and prevention efforts to be effective, we must work with the family as a unit. Interventions aimed only at isolated age groups show smaller sustained gains in cognitive development.

## Foundations for success

Family literacy programs are known to be most effective when **four components** are integrated in a comprehensive service approach to intergenerational education:

### Direct Adult

Raising the literacy level of parents helps them gain the motivation, skills, and knowledge to find jobs or pursue further education or training. Adults with strong literacy are better prepared to support their children's learning.

### Direct Child

Increasing the developmental, literacy and language skills of children better prepares them for academic and social success in school and lays the foundation for life-long learning.

### Parent and Child Together

Providing role models and structured situations for positive parent-child interaction empowers parents as the primary teachers of their children, strengthens the learning relationship between parent and child, and helps parents feel more comfortable in the school setting.

### Parent Education and Support

Giving parents an opportunity to share concerns with trained professionals and/or their peers helps them learn new parenting strategies, and supports their efforts to deal more effectively with day-to-day challenges.

## Helping communities blossom

Some of the family literacy programs and services serving BC families include: Families in Motion ● Literacy and Parenting Skills ● Aboriginal Literacy and Parenting Skills ● Learning Together: the Road to Success ● Parents as Literacy Supporters ● Reading and Parenting Program ● Parents as Teachers ● Families Behind Books ● Parent Tot Reading Programs ● Books for Babies ● Library story time ● New Beginnings ● Come Read with Me ● Parent-Child Mother Goose ● Early Learning Canada ● Homework clubs ● Homespun ● Reading Rascals ● Books for Breakfast ● Born to Read ● Leap into Books ● Stone Soup ● Parents Reading: Children Succeeding ● Get Ready to Read ● Partners in Education