



SPELL: Supporting Parents in Early Literacy Through Libraries Blueprint



COLORADO
Department of Education
Colorado State Library



INSTITUTE of
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SERVICES

How to Use the SPELL Blueprint

These recommendations for public libraries and other organizations that serve parents of children birth through three are based on research findings from the SPELL project. It is not possible to incorporate all of the recommendations at one time; consider selecting a few items from the In Your Organization section and the Reaching Out section to begin with, or focus on incorporating the suggestions in one of the main headings in both of those two sections. Use the recommendations to inform your existing programs and services, as well as to incorporate into planning for new ones.

Items marked with a green diamond are easy and inexpensive to implement!

In Your Organization

Staff training

- Train all staff and board members on the importance of early literacy and effective practices.
- Empower all staff to know that they can make a difference by informing parents and caregivers about early literacy and empowering them to include early literacy activities in the daily lives of their families.
- Train children's staff in the SPELL findings and blueprint.
- Train all staff in cultural proficiency.
- Cross-train with your partners so that library staff learn from their partners' expertise and teach their partners about early literacy and all library services.

Space

- Create a welcoming, safe, and inviting space for caregivers and young children. If possible, have a separate space for children birth through 5 and their families.
- Include manipulative displays and toys that are developmentally appropriate for children under 3 in the children's area.

- ❖ Post early literacy tips and activities around your organization.
- Create a "loud zone" for young children and families.

Collections

- Have a rich collection of board books in languages common in your community and that are culturally appropriate for cultures in your community, along with wordless picture books.
- Offer collections of books on parenting and early literacy for parents, in different languages as appropriate in your community.
- Provide themed kits for easy checkout that are developmentally appropriate for specific ages (birth-3 months, 3-6 months, etc.). Each kit may include several books, a music CD, manipulatives, suggestions for easy activities, and early literacy and brain development tips for parents and caregivers.
- Display, organize, and/or label books based on age level (babies, toddlers, preschool, etc.).

Programs

- ❖ In programs and everyday service, model simple early literacy activities and let parents know how important—and easy—it is for them to do such activities every day.
- Provide programs for young children and parents at times convenient for working parents to attend (evenings, Saturdays).
- Engage older siblings in early literacy activities with younger children; recognize them for their efforts.
- Actively engage parents in their children's early literacy activities; programs like 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten are effective at this, as are lapsit programs that encourage and model early literacy activities for parents.
- Offer parent training classes on early literacy, which should include a group dynamic in which parents support one another as they learn and develop their home early literacy practice.
- Evaluate the success of your early literacy programs, especially in reaching low-income parents and increasing parents' home early literacy activities.
- ❖ Offer a fun gaming element to your programs; this makes reading and other early literacy activities engaging and fun for both kids and parents.
- ❖ Provide picture-based activity sheets with early literacy tips and activities for parents that may have low English language literacy.

Policies

- End overdue fines for children's materials.
- Reconsider fees for lost or damaged items on children's materials, as damaged and lost materials are an inevitable aspect of library use, particularly with very young children, and need to be considered the cost of doing business with the library's young patrons.

Customer service

- ❖ Ensure parents know that their very young children are welcome in your organization.
- ❖ Take every opportunity to present early literacy tips and simple activities to parents of very young children in a friendly, engaging way, including modeling activities with their children.
- Employ staff that speak languages common in the community, or at least provide translators during children's programs as well as signage and resources in those language

Reaching Out

Relationships

- Actively partner with other organizations that serve parents with young children; together you can cross-promote services and programs; train others on delivering an early literacy message; reach more parents; maximize valuable time and resources; and sustain services more easily.
 - Types of organizations to consider for partnerships:
 - pediatricians' offices and health clinics, especially Reach Out and Read clinics, as well as clinics providing services for expecting parents
 - county/municipal health departments
 - religious institutions
 - home visiting nursing services for expecting and new parents
 - childcare centers
 - preschools, Early Head Starts, and Head Starts
 - social service agencies (WIC, etc.)
 - neighboring library jurisdictions
 - parks and community centers
 - home visiting parent groups
 - school districts
 - community play groups
 - American Indian tribes
 - early childhood education nonprofits and governmental agencies
 - migrant education programs
- Get to know people at early childhood organizations in your community. Talk with them regularly to make sure you are familiar with their services and they are knowledgeable about yours.
- Reach out to stores, businesses, and services to ask them to promote early literacy awareness and practices, as well as your programs.
 - Types of businesses/services to consider approaching for promotion:
 - big box stores
 - baby/children's stores
 - toy stores
 - post offices
 - gas stations
 - grocery stores
 - convenience stores
 - public transportation
- Assess your relationships and collaborations regularly to address their effectiveness, and routinely look for potential new partnerships.

Methods

- Promote your early literacy programs and services, as well as early literacy awareness, widely in your community; consider the two lists above, plus websites, social media, direct email, and text messaging. Traditional media, including radio, newspaper, and TV advertising and interviews can be effective as well. Also consider messaging lists for parents with children in different age groups.
- ❖ Word of mouth advertising is powerful (and free!).
- ❖ Deliver the message that very young children are welcome in your library; their presence is not bothersome, even when they may be loud or on the move.
- ❖ Promote *all* of your services to parents, not just those for young children and for parents.

Actions

- Present outreach programs in convenient locations and in conjunction with existing programs that serve low-income parents.
- Offer outreach programs at the same places and times consistently.
- Leverage the online environment for promotion and service delivery. Low-income parents report using the internet and social media sites for information on parenting. Begin by using your organization's online venues, and by promoting free apps and text messaging services; if successful in your community and funding allows, consider subscription services to offer more content.
- Reach out to expecting parents (especially first-time parents) at prenatal programs and events (or hold events at your organization) about early literacy. Consider hosting a community baby shower and including information about early literacy during the festivities, or providing outreach to expectant teen parent groups.
- Arrange and/or host early literacy peer support groups for parents. Provide research and methods about early literacy to the groups based upon members' existing knowledge, encourage an influential parent to be the informal group leader, and check in from time to time to provide more tips and evaluate progress.
- Partner with childcare centers to provide educators with early literacy resources and support, such as kits that you circulate to centers on a rotating basis. Use this partnership also to connect with parents during drop off and pickup times and special events.

Home Early Literacy Practices

When you take steps from the “In Your Organization” and “Reaching Out” sections, you help lead parents to these ideal early literacy practices at home.

Expecting Parents

Parents expecting their first child will be more knowledgeable about early literacy principles and practices. They will begin to outfit their homes with baby books, music, manipulatives, and other items to create a literacy-rich home environment.

Parents with 2+ Children

The more children that parents have, the busier they are and the less likely they are to read and engage in other early literacy activities daily. Take steps like making such activities into a fun game, engaging older siblings and grandparents in the activities, making program times and locations very convenient, and being sure it's simple and free for parents to find and check out reading materials.

Home Environment

Literacy-rich home environments have lots of reading materials (owned or borrowed from a library) for both young children and everyone in the household; pre-writing and coloring materials (playdough, crayons, paper, pencils, chalkboard and chalk, etc.); music for young children; age-appropriate manipulatives and games/puzzles; and comfy, well-lit spaces to read.

Early Literacy Knowledge Base

Parents of very young children that are knowledgeable about early literacy as well as baby and toddler behavior and cognitive development may be more likely to engage in effective early literacy activities in the home. Classes and reading materials for parents about early literacy may empower them; peer support from other parents and caregivers can as well.

Home Habits

Ideally, parents will engage in early literacy activities every day at home, including reading, talking, singing, playing, and writing, using simple but effective methods, and will make the activities such a habit that they don't see it as something extra to do. Modeling early literacy activities for parents with the intent of replication can be very effective in beginning these habits. Parents and other family members can set an excellent example for their children by reading and listening to audiobooks themselves at home for information and pleasure.

On-the-Go Habits

There are many early literacy activities that parents can do when they're in the car, store, public transportation, other people's homes, etc. Activities like pointing out the text that's all around, reading signs aloud, and asking children to name and describe objects are simple and effective habits that parents can develop. Age-appropriate educational apps and text messaging services can be another effective option when parents and caregivers interact meaningfully with their children during viewing.