

# COACH'S CORNER

*Coach's Corner is a DIEEC blog dedicated to providing fresh ideas for all early childhood education professionals.*



Written by Meghan Pallante  
DIEEC Quality Improvement Specialist  
& ECE Blogger

## Literacy in the Early Childhood Environment Part 2 of 3 in our 2025 Literacy Series

In [April's installment of Coach's Corner](#), we discussed setting up literacy-rich early childhood education environments. This month, we will expand our focus by exploring literacy activities. As always, with young children, we want to be sure that our activities are hands-on and engaging. We can break down the activities into several categories: oral language, alphabet knowledge, and phonological awareness. Many of these concepts and activities will be most developmentally appropriate for preschoolers and older toddlers. However, the first category we will focus on, oral language, is perfect for infants and toddlers!

### Oral Language

Language and literacy are intrinsically linked. The building blocks of reading rely on the child's foundation of language development, which in turn is fostered by the adults and peers in a child's life. Simply having conversations with a child can have a profound impact on language skills. On the next page there are several easy ideas for using oral language with different ages.



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## **Infants**

- During routines, describe what you are doing. State each step of the diaper changing process, or describe the taste, color, and texture of the foods you are feeding them at mealtimes.
- Describe the baby's emotions and the emotions of their peers.
- Fingerplays and songs are another great way to expose babies to language.



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## **Toddlers**

- Use descriptive words including specific object names, size, shape, color, texture, and sound. An example could be, “Jake, I see you are playing with the big, red truck.”
- Give the child words to describe their feelings. For example, when a child misses their parent, “James, I can tell you are feeling sad. Can I give you a hug?”
- Add words to actions during play. For example, in dramatic play, “Logan, I see you are rocking the baby. Is he sleepy?”



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## **Preschoolers**

- Educators should focus on more open-ended and complex questions.
- Conversation prompts are a great tool to use during both routines and playtimes to help engage children in conversations with adults and peers. Some examples could be, “What is something that made you smile today?” or “Would you rather run like a cheetah or fly like an eagle? Why?”



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## Alphabet Knowledge

Alphabet knowledge includes the recognition of letters and the ability to produce letter sounds. In the past, many children learned these concepts through flashcards during a designated instruction time. However, we've since learned that this is not developmentally appropriate for young children. In early childhood education settings, we want to encourage alphabet knowledge through hands-on, play-based activities. Below are two engaging, low- or no-cost activities you can incorporate into your day with older toddlers and preschoolers.

### Alphabet bean bag toss

Print out and laminate letters. Spread a few letters on the floor, such as the first letter of their names or letters that they have learned already. Call out one letter at a time and have the child(ren) throw their bean bags on that letter. For children who are ready to move on to letter sounds, you could say, "Throw your bean bag on the letter that says /b/."



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### Alphabet parking

Have the children create a parking lot or garage with blocks. Use painter's tape to create parking spots on the floor or table. Add letters to each parking space. Put the corresponding letters on toy cars. Encourage children to park the cars in their matching letter parking spots.



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**Tip:** As children become more familiar with the alphabet, you can label the parking spots with capital letters and the cars with lowercase letters.

## Phonological Awareness

Understanding the "sounds" of language is an important step in emergent literacy. Phonological awareness has to do with learning the various aspects of spoken language, such as phonemes (the smallest unit of sound that can distinguish meaning in a language), rhymes, and syllables (Gillon, 2004; Lefebvre, Trudeau, & Sutton, 2011). For simple ideas for everyday conversations with younger children, see NAEYC's [Word Play Every Day](#) suggestions. In the next page there are some activity ideas to encourage phonological awareness for those preschool-age children who are ready

## Sentence Walk

Choose a few sentences from a familiar classroom book. Put laminated circles on the floor in a straight line. Have the child jump to a new circle each time you read a word of the sentence. This helps them understand that sentences are made up of individual words.

## Sylla-building

Pull out your interlocking blocks, such as Legos or Duplos. Show the children different objects or pictures of different objects. Say the name of the object or picture broken down into syllables. Have the child build a tower, adding a block for each syllable. For example, “strawberry” has 3 syllables, so the child would build a tower with 3 blocks.



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## Disappearing rhymes

Draw a picture on a whiteboard. For example, draw a picture that includes a house, sun, trees, clouds, flowers, sky, etc. Ask the child to erase the part of the picture that rhymes with “mouse.” The child would then erase the house. Continue this for each picture.



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These are just a few ways to incorporate emergent literacy concepts into your day. We would love to hear about fun and engaging ways you are encouraging literacy in your program!

## References:

Gillon, G. T. (2004). *Phonological awareness: From research to practice*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.  
Lefebvre, P., Trudeau, N., Sutton, A. (2011). Enhancing vocabulary, print awareness, and phonological awareness through shared storybook reading with low-income preschoolers. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 11(4), 453-479.

## Professional Learning Experiences:

[Mealtime Conversations \(DIEEC Microlearning\)](#)

[How to Read a Book to Young Children \(DIEEC Microlearning\)](#)

## Resources:

[What We Know About Early Literacy and Language Development \(Zero to Three\)](#)

[Word Play Throughout the Day \(NAEYC\)](#)

[Everyday Steps to Reading and Writing \(NAEYC\)](#)