

Play and Learn Together: A Guide to Family Literacy in BC



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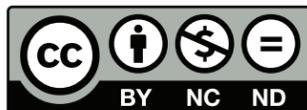
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What is family literacy?

“Family literacy refers to the way parents, children, and extended family members use literacy at home and in the community. It occurs naturally during the routines of daily life and helps children and adults get things done.” (Hayden & Sanders, 2017)

Hayden and Sanders’ definition acknowledges the multiple, often unrecognized, literacy tasks that are embedded in everyday life. It encompasses the diversity of family literacy practices and underlines the non-formal learning that happens in families.

Many other definitions of family literacy exist. One thing that emerges clearly is that parents or other family caregivers **MUST** be involved for family literacy to happen.

In this guidebook, parent will be defined as a significant adult and primary caretaker in a child’s life. This includes grandparents and other extended family members.



Introduction

Families who play together learn together. Sharing everyday activities and early experiences with family members supports children’s healthy development and learning. Family literacy programs help parents and other caregivers recognize and enhance this important work.

This guidebook is designed for those who are:

- wondering what’s involved in family literacy programs,
- developing a new family literacy program, or
- looking for a tool to help describe or reflect on family literacy program work.

Why is family literacy important?

Literacy matters. The importance of literacy skills to positive life outcomes is well documented. Literacy skills have an impact on health and safety, educational success, employment and earnings, and civic engagement.

The family is an important starting place for literacy. It can provide a positive learning environment that fosters the building blocks of literacy. Through family interactions children gain the skills, knowledge and attitudes that support future learning.

What are family literacy programs?

Family literacy programs are intergenerational programs that support the development of a variety of skills for both parent and child. While providing activities that support children’s early learning, they also help improve adults’ understanding of literacy and how best to support literacy development in the home environment. Family literacy programs may also help improve adult literacy.

Although the focus is on building literacy skills for everyday life, family literacy programs can also strengthen parent-child relationships.



Goals of Family Literacy Programs

The following widely-shared goals are identified in *The BC Framework of Statements and Standards of Best Practices in Family Literacy* (1999).

- 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 language and literacy development from birth throughout the school years
- Provide children with developmentally appropriate learning opportunities that support “school readiness”
- Support parents in the challenging and critical job of nurturing children who will become successful adults and contribute to a strong society
- Provide the opportunity for parents to pursue their own educational goals
- Promote and support literacy and lifelong learning

Each family literacy program will have specific objectives to meet the needs in its community. These could include connecting families to other community services and programs and creating a bridge between activities in the program and the home environment.

Who benefits from family literacy programs?

Most often we think about how children benefit from a family literacy program. Research has shown that family literacy programs can have a positive effect on children’s motivation, behaviour and self-esteem, as well as their language, literacy and numeracy. Family literacy programs can help preschoolers get ready for school.

Parents can also benefit from family literacy programs. They can learn skills and gain knowledge to use in daily life to support their children’s learning and development. They can develop a better understanding of the school system, including expectations at school, and become more comfortable in the school environment. Some programs provide direct instruction so adults can improve their academic and/or workforce skills.

Family literacy programs often provide social support for parents, with many participants forming their own social and support networks.



Guiding Principles in Family Literacy Programs

These guiding principles outlined by the Centre for Family Literacy (2019) summarize the values and beliefs that currently underlie family literacy practice.

Intergenerational

Work with parents and children, directly or indirectly, to establish an intergenerational cycle of literacy achievement.

Collaborative

Recognize the importance of collaboration, and are developed, delivered, and continually improved with participants and community input.

Build on strengths

Build on literacy behaviours and strengths already present in families and introduce additional strategies to help further enrich literacy activities in the home.

Responsive

Flexible and responsive to the needs and interests of the families who participate in them.

Inclusive

Inclusive of diverse participants and use resources that are appropriate.

Essence

Offer activities that celebrate and emphasize the joy of learning.

Focus on adult learning

Effective in providing adults with confidence in their role as a child's first teacher and their commitment to lifelong learning.

Sound methods

Follow sound educational practices, appropriate for the literacy development of children and adults. Practitioners select from a variety of research-based approaches according to the needs of each group.

Staff qualifications

Have qualified and trained staff appropriate to the educational needs of children and adults and appropriate to specific roles and responsibilities within a particular delivery model.

Access

Held in accessible, welcoming locations. Support is given to overcome barriers to participation, such as lack of childcare.

Evaluation

Include an on-going, manageable evaluation process that produces information useful for program development and accountability.

These guiding principles are dynamic. As family literacy practice evolves, it is anticipated that these principles may change.



Types of Family Literacy Programs

Family literacy programs can look quite different from one another. The needs and available resources in each community have an impact on the programming that is offered. One way of classifying family literacy programs is by the participant (parent and/or child) receiving the programming. This typology, developed by Ruth Nickse (Skage, 1995), includes:

Type 1: Direct Adults - Direct Children:
Programming is designed for both adults and children, separately and/or together.



Type 2: Indirect Adults – Indirect Children:
Children are accompanied by adults to events that focus on literacy activities for enjoyment with little or no direct instruction. Family literacy materials may be distributed.



Type 3: Direct Adults – Indirect Children:
Adults participate alone with the focus on adult learning and parenting skills; child minding may be provided.



Type 4: Indirect Adults - Direct Children:
Children are the focus of programming and adults learn through informal observation and may be encouraged to participate.



Family Literacy Programs in BC

Hundreds of family literacy programs are making a difference for families in BC communities. The following examples provide a sample of the family literacy programs offered across the province.

Chilliwack Family Literacy Program focuses on preparing adults to upgrade their English and/or math skills, work toward their Adult Dogwood, help their children with their homework, improve communication and computer skills, and return to school or work. Free infant/toddler childcare and preschool is available while parents are in class. Facilitated learning in math, English, computer skills, current events, parenting and personal development is offered in three hour sessions, six times a week from September through June. Learn more: www.comserv.bc.ca/family-literacy-1

Come Read With Me is a program designed to teach parents simple reading strategies so they can more confidently support their young readers with at home reading. It is offered in a one and a half hour session that includes time for parents only and time for parents and children together. It is done most successfully in partnership with schools and is best suited for parents of Grade 1 students. A parent handbook “Reading Success at Home” that supports the content of the workshop is available as a free download. Learn more: www.decoda.ca/resource/rsc-child-family-literacy-curriculum/come-read-with-me/

Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) features a peer Home Visitor system that delivers a curriculum that helps prepare children for school. Role play is used to teach activities designed for children and parents to do together to develop literacy, language, science, motor, and math skills. One-hour weekly home visits are offered for 30 weeks in a year, for up to three years. The core program has been modified to create Aboriginal HIPPY and Multicultural HIPPY. Learn more: www.mothersmattercentre.ca/what-is-hippy/

Love 2 Learn is an early learning program for children two to five years old and their parents or caregivers. A facilitator leads a circle time with songs, stories, and rhymes. The facilitator models ways in which the parent can engage the child in conversations and activities around literacy. Materials are available for learning through play experiences. The program includes a lending library and ideas to take home. The sessions are one and a half hours long over eight weeks. Learn more: www.decoda.ca/resource/rsc-child-family-literacy-curriculum/love-2-learn/

Parent-Child Mother Goose Program® is a group experience for parents and their babies and young children. The program introduces adults and children to the pleasure and power of using rhymes, songs, and stories together. Activities are designed for children and parents/grandparents/other extended family members together. Sessions are one and a half hours long and run for eight to 10 weeks. This program is offered in a variety of locations and is often embedded in early years or other family resource programs. Learn more: www.bccf.ca/ and nationalpcmgp.ca/

Parents as Literacy Supporters in Immigrant Communities (IPALS) is a play-based, culturally responsive, bilingual family literacy program. It is an adaptation of Parents as Literacy Supporters (PALS). Sessions include time with preschool children only, parents only, and children and parents together. IPALS includes eight to 10 sessions of two to three hours and covers reading, writing, early math, technology, and physical literacy. IPALS is available in Mandarin, Cantonese, Arabic, Punjabi, Farsi, Vietnamese, Karen, and Somali. Learn more: www.decoda.ca/practitioners/family-literacy-and-early-learning/working-with-immigrant-communities/

StrongStart is an early learning drop-in program designed to prepare children for success in Kindergarten. It is an early learning initiative of the BC government. Available during the school year, children from birth through five attend with parents or caregivers. They participate in play-based early learning activities including stories, music and art. Each school district has one or more locations offering this program, usually located within schools. Learn more: www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/early-learning/support/programs/strongstart-bc

Professional Development

Decoda Resources

- Family Literacy Fact Sheet
www.decoda.ca/resource/fact-sheets/family-literacy-fact-sheet/
- Family Literacy Online Resources
www.decoda.ca/resources/online-resources/?fwp_resource_categories=rsc-child-family
- Family Literacy Resource List
www.decoda.ca/resources/library/library-materials-by-topic/family-literacy-materials/
- The Decoda Literacy Library is a free service available to anyone in BC. The collection includes a variety of resources on family literacy and early learning. Circulation is by mail.
www.decoda.ca/resources/library/
- Decoda webinars are offered on topics in adult and family literacy.
www.decoda.ca/practitioners/professional-development-community-literacy/webinars/

Training Opportunities

- Centre for Family Literacy (Alberta)
www.famlit.ca/training/index.shtml
- Conestoga College
continuing-education.conestogac.on.ca/programs/family-literacy-facilitation
- PALS, IPALS and Aboriginal PALS
www.decoda.ca/practitioners/professional-development-community-literacy/pals/
- Penn State Postbaccalaureate Certificate in Family Literacy
www.worldcampus.psu.edu/degrees-and-certificates/family-literacy-certificate/overview
- The Parent-Child Mother Goose Program Training
nationalpcmgp.ca/training/

Websites

- ABC Life Literacy Canada – Family Literacy
abclifeliteracy.ca/family-literacy
- Centre for Family Literacy (Alberta)
www.famlit.ca/index.shtml
- Decoda Literacy Solutions
www.decoda.ca/
- Every Child Ready to Read
everychildreadytoread.org/
- Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy
ed.psu.edu/goodling-institute
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
www.naeyc.org/
- National Center for Families Learning
www.familieslearning.org/
- NWT Literacy Council – Family and Community Literacy
www.nwtliteracy.ca/resources/family-and-community-literacy#73
- Saskatchewan Literacy Network – Family Literacy Resources
saskliteracy.ca/family-literacy-resources/



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HIPPY facilitators ©HIPPY Canada

Appendix A: Characteristics of Adult Learners

In distinguishing learning in adults from learning in children, the following characteristics of adult learners have been proposed (Herod, 2012):

- Adults are autonomous and self-directed.
- Adults have a foundation of life experiences and knowledge. Adults want to learn something that is relevant to them.
- Adults are goal oriented.
- Adults are practical.

These characteristics exist on a continuum and there can be wide variations between individuals.

What does this mean for practice? Adults learn best when:

- They are involved in the planning and evaluation of their learning.
- Their prior knowledge and experience are respected and connected to new learning.
- Learning is explicitly designed to meet their goals.
- A connection is made between what they are learning and their lives.
- They are treated with respect.
- Opportunities for interaction and collaboration are available.

Appendix B: Understanding Child Development

There are two tools in British Columbia to help guide work with children.

The first tool is the *British Columbia Early Learning Framework*. This resource, updated in 2019, is a guide to providing rich early learning experiences for young children, from birth through Grade 3. The framework is guided by two sets of principles:

I Early Learning Framework Principles

- Children are strong, capable in their uniqueness and full of potential.
- Families have the most important role in contributing to children’s well-being and learning.
- Educators are researchers and collaborators.
- Early years spaces are inclusive.
- People build connection and reconnection to land, culture, community and place.
- Environments are integral to well-being and learning.
- Play is integral to well-being and learning.
- Relationships are the context for well-being and learning.
- Learning is holistic.

II First Peoples Principles of Learning

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits and the ancestors.
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one’s actions.
- Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.
- Learning recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge.
- Learning is embedded in memory, history and story.
- Learning involves patience and time.
- Learning requires exploration of one’s identity.
- Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations.

Practitioners are invited to rethink learning and practice. Focus is on four practices: pedagogy of listening, critical reflection, collaborative dialogue and pedagogical narration.

The Early Learning Framework describes four living inquiries: well-being and belonging; engagement with others, materials, and the world; communication and literacies; and identities, social responsibility and diversity. Pathways to engage with each living inquiry are detailed.

Learn more: www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/early-learning/teach/early-learning-framework

The second tool is the Early Development Instrument (EDI). The EDI is a questionnaire that covers five core areas of child development: physical health and well-being, language and cognitive development, social competence, emotional maturity, and communication skills and knowledge. It is completed by kindergarten teachers across BC for all the children in their class.

Data is analyzed by the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) at UBC. The results are used to develop a picture of how the children in a neighbourhood, region, or the province are doing. (The data is not used to evaluate individual children.) This information can help family literacy practitioners understand the strengths and needs in their communities. It can also be used to support proposals for community programs and projects.



Appendix C: A Planning and Evaluation Tool for Family Literacy Programs

The welcoming environment and playful learning that happens in family literacy programs exists because of the thoughtful planning and decision making that precedes and accompanies it.

In 1999, participants in a Best Practices in Family Literacy Forum convened by Literacy BC developed a *BC Framework of Statements and Standards of Best Practices in Family Literacy*. This framework describes key elements of effective family literacy programs. With minor changes, it remains relevant.

These key elements can be used as a guide to plan a new family literacy program or a tool to reflect on an existing family literacy program.

Philosophy	Yes	In Progress	Not Yet
There is a written philosophy/mission statement.			
The philosophy/mission statement has been shared with program staff.			
The philosophy/mission statement is reviewed regularly.			
Notes:			

Planning	Yes	In Progress	Not Yet
Community needs are assessed.			
The target population for the program is defined.			
There are clearly defined program goals and objectives, that include literacy outcomes.			
Planning sessions are conducted regularly.			
Everyone involved with the program participates in setting program goals.			
Everyone involved in the program is aware of the goals for the current year.			
Progress towards goals is reviewed.			
Notes:			

Funding	Yes	In Progress	Not Yet
Resources for staffing, facilities, supplies and materials are adequate.			
Resources are available to cover support services for families, e.g. child minding, transportation.			
Funding is assured on a regular basis.			
Alternate funding sources are explored.			
Reports to funders are complete and on time.			
Notes:			

Community Outreach	Yes	In Progress	Not Yet
Links to other educational programs in the community are developed and maintained.			
Links to social service agencies are developed and maintained.			
The program reviews its community and organizational relationships regularly.			
Referrals to other programs and services are made as required.			
Notes:			

Awareness and Promotion	Yes	In Progress	Not Yet
The program determines and uses successful participant recruitment strategies.			
Recruitment strategies have been implemented in accordance with program needs.			
Contacts with media and referral sources are developed and maintained.			
Program information is publicized regularly with posters, brochures, newsletters and social media.			
Clear language and design principles are used in print and online communications.			
Notes:			

Access	Yes	In Progress	Not Yet
The program has advertised contact information and hours of service.			
The program is accessible to families.			
Program facilities are accessible for persons with disabilities.			
The program is free.			
The program is offered at a suitable time.			
The program length is suitable.			
Notes:			

Family Support	Yes	In Progress	Not Yet
The program provides child minding.			
The program provides healthy meals.			
The program provides bus tickets.			
The program provides information about counselling, financial services, educational or employment opportunities, supplies and/or resources.			
Networking opportunities are provided.			
Former participants mentor current participants.			
Information on follow up activities is provided at the program end.			
Notes:			

Facilities and Equipment	Yes	In Progress	Not Yet
Program space is adequate for program activities.			
Office space is adequate.			
Display and storage space are adequate.			
The physical space is safe and free from health hazards.			
Heating, ventilation and lighting are adequate.			
Washroom facilities are adequate.			
Program equipment is adequate and developmentally appropriate.			
A first aid kit and fire extinguisher are on site and checked regularly.			
Notes:			

Instructional Strategies and Materials	Yes	In Progress	Not Yet
Instructional strategies are built around the interests and diverse needs of participants.			
Instructional strategies are based on an understanding of child development and adult learning.			
Instructional materials for children are age appropriate.			
Staff encourages adult/child interactions throughout the program.			
Instructional strategies are inclusive and culturally appropriate.			
Learning materials and activities reflect the home, culture and community of program participants.			
Staff shares their knowledge of child development with families through various means: dialogue, presentations and/or guests.			
Staff enhances learning by building strong relationships with adults and children.			
Notes:			

Administration	Yes	In Progress	Not Yet
The paid staffing level is adequate.			
Job descriptions are available.			
Staff and volunteer qualifications are clearly defined and appropriate.			
Staff and volunteers participate in professional development and training.			
A program budget is developed.			
The program complies with all relevant privacy legislation.			
Adequate financial records are maintained.			
Attendance, assessment and progress records are kept.			
Confidentiality of records is assured.			
Notes:			

Program Evaluation	Yes	In Progress	Not Yet
There is ongoing program assessment.			
The program is modified as needed.			
Program staff, volunteers and participants are involved in program evaluation.			
Program staff know the reasons for poor attendance or dropouts and make necessary adjustments.			
The program is reviewed annually against program goals and objectives.			
Reports are prepared for funders and stakeholders.			
Notes:			

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