



# **Building Blocks**



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## Building a Parent-Child Literacy Program at Your Library

Sharon Snow



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# Introduction

*Building Blocks: Building a Parent-Child Early Literacy Program at Your Library* is a tool for children's librarians to use for parent-child early literacy programs. This book includes handouts and activities for six parent and child workshops featuring the six basic early literacy skills. These workshops are designed in two units, one for parents and one for children, and are presented simultaneously.

This program is made up of six components which can be presented in six or four sessions, one each week or once a month for six months. It is important that both the child and the parent attend all sessions. If six weeks does not fit into your library's schedule, it can be completed in four weeks or months, doing two skills per session.

Each session, one of the early literacy skills will be presented. Similar activities will be conducted in both the children's and parent's sections. Parents will learn the values of the six skills and activities and then they will be asked to do them at home with their child. The most important ideas that parents will take away with them is that learning can be fun. We don't teach them to teach their children to read; rather we want to give parents tools to provide their children with fun experiences that reinforce early literacy skills. A very important thing for parents to remember is that this process should be *fun* for the child *and* the parent.

Parents are a child's first teachers. They know when their child is in a good mood, which is important for learning. Children love to do things with their parents. They want to learn from them. The program will encourage parents to make time to sing, read, and play with their children. The program will also emphasize the importance of talking to their child. They need to understand that children who enter school with a large vocabulary are more likely to succeed in school.

The sessions teach parents to give their child an opportunity to explore and experience new things, and to take advantage of the many museums and other attractions in the community. Many museums have discounted admission for children with family passes and programs for low-income families. If a parent is not comfortable going to some of these locations independently, many of them have special programs for parents and children so that the family becomes accustomed to the place. In this way they and other families can learn together.

Public libraries offer a wide variety of free programs for parents and children. Children's librarians need to encourage parents to take part in as many programs as

possible. This means an active promotional program with plenty of flyers placed out in the community for parents to take home.

Parents must also be encouraged to come to the library. The first assignment for the early literacy workshops is to have the parent get a library card and one for their child. They should be given an introduction to the library's Web site so they can find out about programming and other services available to them at the library.

Each week both the children and parents begin their class with the same welcoming song and the ABC song. This is important because they will both know the songs and be able to sing these songs on the way walking home or driving in the car and later at home. Each week, provide as many books as possible for parents to look at and check out to take home. As each skill is introduced, corresponding books should be introduced to reinforce the skill. Children's librarians must model good read aloud skills for the parents. Reading aloud from some of the books will entice the audience to check them out to take home.

# 1

## Libraries and Early Literacy: A Background

Librarians can stay relevant in the twenty-first century when they build on those areas where they have excelled. One of these areas is service to youth. A hot topic today is early-emergent literacy for children ages 0–6. Librarians also need to be players in the No Child Left Behind initiative and in campaigns designed to get children ready to read and ready for school.

In 1989, Elizabeth Sulzby and William H. Teale presented the idea of *emergent literacy* as reading and writing behaviors that precede conventional literacy. *Early literacy* is the earliest phases of literacy development, the period between birth and the time when children read and write conventionally.

Librarians can disseminate early literacy skills by providing four key services: programs, materials, age-appropriate spaces, and the opportunity for families, parents, and caregivers to gain skills through modeling. Libraries have always been the perfect place to nurture and foster lifelong learning with family literacy programs.

### Programming

For many years, California's public libraries have included a Families for Literacy component of adult literacy programs. Families for Literacy includes three elements: literacy instruction for adults including parenting education; pre-reading and other literacy activities for children; and time for parents to use their new literacy skills with their children. The most important part happens when parents and children come together and interact with each other.

At the Dr. Robert Cruz Alum Rock Branch of the San Jose Public Library, Reading Readiness was a program in which librarians conducted reading readiness workshops for parents and, simultaneously, the children worked on their pre-reading skills. The goal was for parents to have the knowledge, skills, and activities to use in the home with their children. Their children would be learning pre-reading skills that they would be ready to do at home and would continue to strengthen while having fun learning with their parents.

Children's librarians are natural partners to help parents in the most important role they will ever take on, their child's first teacher. Librarians understand the importance