



## *Growing Readers:*

*A Manual to Encourage Early Literacy in at-risk Families*

The early years are prime time for planting the seeds of literacy. This little booklet reflects the experience of Adolescent's Family Support Services Niagara, in working with teen parents and their children to stimulate this aspect of their development. We hope that this manual will help you to assist your families to love reading.

## *Your Very own Book Adventures Club!*

Literacy is the key that opens the door to the world. As care-givers with young children and their families, we can give these little ones a head start by building positive attitudes and beginning skills for reading. At the same time, we can strengthen the tie between parent and child, as they share in the delights of discovery and learning.

For the purposes of this booklet, we include in literacy all those things that have to do with getting meaning from abstract communications: not only the printed word, but meaning from pictures, from spoken stories, from words alone, from songs and rhymes, and numbers too.

We know that growing readers is a very complex process. Reading engages many areas of the brain, and, at the same time, helps the brain to develop. Reading readiness is enhanced through all the senses: sight, touch - including the body temperature of the one holding an infant, sound - the soft sound of a story being told, or read.

## PREFACE



The emotional warmth of the 'read with me' experience helps to build a love of books, and at the same time the magical parent-child bond.

Our purpose in this manual is to provide ideas for care-givers, in the context of the day-to-day activity of child care, ideas for promoting the beginnings of the process: happy, comfortable experiences with books, joyful play with words in every form, and support and encouragement for Moms and Dads to get involved, and stay involved, in their child's growth as a learner.

Many ideas and activities are offered; you will naturally choose the ones that best suit your children and their families. We hope you will revisit the menu often, and add your own notes for future reference. Your efforts and ideas will attract and stimulate both child and parent, drawing them time and time again toward the book area, to the excitement of learning, and to the joys of their own developing bond.



## *Your Very own Book Adventures Club!*

The parents in your group will have a range of experience with books - some positive, some less so. For some, the notion of helping babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers grow toward literacy is intimidating. For others, the English language is a barrier; for others, their own lack of comfort with books and reading creates anxiety.

To help get around some of these difficulties, we recommend forming a 'Book Adventures Club'. The Club idea carries a message of informality, of participation, and of belonging. The Club can become whatever you and the participants want to make it; the essentials, we believe, are:



◇ Some designated space, where the central focus is the interaction between parent and child around books. This usually means

◇ A relatively quiet area, with good lighting

◇ Some comfortable furniture, with pillows and mats; perhaps a small table where parent and child can sit together and spread out a big picture book.

◇ Easily accessible shelves

◇ Displays related to the activity in the space.

◇ Books - a variety, to appeal to all 'ages and stages' of your clientele

◇ Some 'management' strategies, for keeping, lending, and rotating the books, so that there's always something interesting to see and do.



### **Words to the wise:**

◇ *It's best to keep food and drink away from the book area. Food and beverages are distracters, and will pull attention away from the 'real' event. They can also lead to spills and other minor problems.*

◇ *It's best to keep toys away too - again, because of the distraction factor. If baby wants one to cuddle while reading, no problem - but Lego and action toys really don't belong.*



## *Your Very own Book Adventures Club!*

### **How does a Book Adventures Club work?**

How you operate will depend on your space, your book supply, and your participants. Here are some things to think about:

Once you have your initial supply of books (five or six per child minimum), throw a Kick-Off party, with pizza and juice and whatever else makes it a celebration. This gives you a chance to show off the 'new' dimension of program, and to tell your participants how things will work.

To avoid the intimidation of a too-polished example, have someone tell or read a short, simple story to the group. Give each child a book bag (donated of course) to top off the occasion. After the guided tour, give folks a chance to browse and visit.

If the Big Event won't work for you, try it in small groups - four or five families at a time, with all the same features of celebration.

Basically, two things should happen: i) parent and child should enjoy and look forward to coming into the area to spend time with books, and ii) some books should be taken home for further enjoyment - and, usually (but not always) returned.

Continue to play tour guide as people begin to use the Book space. "Have you noticed this new book by .....?" "Jimmy was fascinated by the toy trucks the other day. He'll probably like this picture book, 'Things with Wheels'.

Pair up families, have them read the same book and then talk about it - as parents, or with the children (age 3 and older).

### **Notes:**



## *Your Very own Book Adventures Club!*

### **More about how a Book Adventures Club works...**

Take LOTS of pictures of your reading folk, and post them around the room

Engage willing parents in doing some special work for the Book Club - planning special book events, or making simple puppets or activity cards to accompany a book. Best if they work in teams!

A parent who is unsure of herself as a reader can be encouraged to talk about the pictures in a book with her young one, or even just to tell stories to the child.

You should see lots of physical contact, eye contact, and smiles!

Ask children at the paint centre to show what they were reading about - post those treasures, with captions and photos of course!



**Notes:**



## **The Books: What do I get, and how?**

Books can be gathered from a variety of sources.

Donations often come from service clubs such as the Kiwanis, or the Early Literacy Consultant through the Ontario Early Years Literacy Initiative. Individuals - grandparents, aunts and uncles often contribute.

Purchases can be made at local bookstores that offer a discount, and at garage sales. Public libraries often have used book sales, or may give away discarded books.

## **Choosing books:**

Naturally you will want books that are interesting for the children, and there are thousands of them out there. Before



your first purchase, it would be wise to consult with a librarian who specializes in Children's Books, to find out the top choices.

Do pay attention to the different age groups (infant, toddler, pre-schooler). Children's language learning moves rapidly, and their book needs move accordingly.

By observing your participating families with the books, and by asking the parents, you will know what to add as the Club gets on its feet. Parents can assist in making a wish-list of titles, topics or types of books.



Generally, if an author has a first-rate book, his or her other books will be equally appealing.



## *Your Very own Book Adventures Club!*



### **Resources to help you choose books:**

There are plenty of resources available to help you choose the range of books you'll need for your families. Ask at your Early Childhood Community Development Centre, and/or public library.

Some of these guides, currently available, are:

Best Books for Children 2002

Great Books about Things Kids Love 2001

Guide to Canadian Children's Books 2003

The New Books Kids Like 2001

**These websites offer a wealth of professional information related to literacy:**

[http://twosocks.ces.ncsu.edu/cyfdb/browse\\_2pageAnnc.php?subcat=Literacy+and+Language&search=NNCCsearch\\_type=browse](http://twosocks.ces.ncsu.edu/cyfdb/browse_2pageAnnc.php?subcat=Literacy+and+Language&search=NNCCsearch_type=browse)

<http://www.akrac.k12.ak.us/AKRAC/Programs/eceread.htm>

### **Words to the wise:**

◇ Try to have enough books to 'change the scenery' often - not just the books, but also the displays and activities that go with them. Your moms and tots will want the thrill of novelty mixed in with old favourites.

◇ Homecare sites can rotate books among the homes. This can be done along with bi-monthly safety inspections.



## How do I manage Book borrowing?

Having books signed out is important for two reasons: you know where your books are, and parents - and their children - gain that sense of responsibility. It's good preparation for them for using a 'real' library as well. The length of time a book can be kept out is entirely up to you and your participants.

Of course, some books may not be returned. While too much of this could be a problem, it's important to realize that every missing book is in someone's home - that can't be a bad thing!



## Dealing with wear and tear

Children's books will bear the marks of affection - wrinkles and tears, spots and stains, handprints and footprints. Your participating parents could become a 'book first-aid crew', to apply book tape or packing tape early, to ensure the longest possible shelf life. But, know when it's over, so that you aren't trying to build excitement around an obvious derelict!

## Two Tools for Tracking:

### ◇ *Sign-out Binder:*

Pages are set up in chart form so that parents sign out books with their name, date and book titles.

### ◇ *Cards and Pockets:*

Each child has a pocket with his/her name printed on the outside. These can be kept in a box or posted on the



wall at the child's level. Pockets are attached to each book. In this pocket is a card with the book title on it. When the book is borrowed, the card comes out of the book and goes in the child's pocket. When the book comes back, the card goes back inside. Children enjoy doing this 'all by themselves' - another boost toward literacy!



## Tips and Tools - 1

### Book Bags

A canvas bag makes it easy for parents to carry the books back and forth. The bag becomes the child's property; this sense of ownership can be boosted with activities to label and decorate the bag, using readily available fabric paint or some form of stitchery - maybe Grandmas and Aunties can get involved too!



### Help from Teachers!

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) - Niagara Local has in the past generously donated book bags for all of the children. Inside the canvas bag were:

- ◇ Two books: Spot's Birthday Party by Eric Hill, Rosie's Walk by Pat Hutchins
- ◇ "Ready to Read!" An ETFO - Niagara pamphlet about reading to children.
- ◇ "The First Years Last Forever": a booklet describing ten guidelines for creating a healthy parent-child relationship and promoting healthy brain development. This booklet is available from the Canadian Institute of Child Health ([www.cich.ca](http://www.cich.ca))
- ◇ A letter welcoming the child, from ETFO



## Tips and Tools - 2



### Book Kits

Book kits are a wonderful way to encourage parents to read and play with their children. A book kit is a book bag or backpack holding a book and play materials related to the book. It also contains an activity card to give parents ideas about encouraging learning with the materials.

The kit should encourage all forms of language and number development:


Speaking	Listening	Reading
Writing	Sorting	Matching
Pattern	Seriation	Sequence
Counting		

Exploration of colours, shapes, letters, letter sounds, sound patterns, opposites, numbers, comparisons, and the five senses.





## The Book Kit - What goes in? What do we do with it?

<b>Book</b>	Corduroy by Don Freeman	Red is Best by Kathy Stinson	Three Little Pigs	Varies depending on the theme. A kit called, "Take Teddy Home".
<b>Materials</b>	Teddy Bear-clothes for the teddy bear	Red pipe cleaners- Different coloured barrettes, mittens or fabric	Three pig puppets, toys or masks. Wolf puppet, toy or mask	Teddy Bear-Crayons, pencils-Wolf puppet, toy or mask
	<p>Dress bear and name body parts. Talk about the colour and feel of the clothes. Sort the clothes into groups by colour, feel, pockets/ no pockets, long sleeve/short sleeve. Make up other ways of sorting the clothes.</p>	<p>Count items. Shape the pipe cleaners into letters. Find things around your home that start with that letter. Sort, match and pattern the barrettes, mittens or fabric scraps.</p>	<p>Build houses for the pigs using things around your home. Act out the story. Hide the pigs and have your child find them. Give them hints. Let your child hide them.</p>	<p>The child and parent draw and write about Teddy's night with them in the journal. Upon return, the child and the teacher look at the journal and share the entry with the other children.</p>



## Motivators and Rewards - 1

Teen parents face many barriers with reading to their children: their time; how comfortable they are with books; their reading level; and not being read to as children. Motivators and rewards get parents excited about beginning reading and keep the excitement going.

### Motivator #1: Once upon a caterpillar...

Cut a supply of circles, about the size of a small plate, from brightly-coloured construction paper. Put eyes and whiskers on one, to be the caterpillar's head; post that up on a wall with lots of space behind it.

When a book is read, print its title and the reader's name on a circle, and post that as a section of the caterpillar's body...and watch it grow!

Celebrate when the caterpillar gets twenty - or forty - sections!



### Motivator #2: Building Reading



Squares are cut out of construction paper (about 20cm by 20cm).

When the parents and children return with their book, the staff prints a message on the "block" as they did with the caterpillar.



### Motivators and Rewards - 2

Each child has a bingo card. This is sheet of paper (8 1/2 " x 11") with a bingo style grid and the Book Adventures Club graphic at the top.

The bingo cards are kept in plastic sleeves in a binder.

When parents and children have read a book, they put a stamp or a sticker on one of the squares.

When a row has been filled, the child gets a special treat.



### Motivator #4: Super Reader Stamping Book

Each page has the children's names listed on the left side in large print. When the child borrows and returns a book, he/she stamps beside his/her name. When the child has three stamps, the child gets a special treat.

... "Our Books"			
Annie			
Ben			
David			
Hannah			

#### Treats

The treat can be a favourite snack, a special craft or a dollar store item. The child picks the treat whenever possible. If the child chooses a favourite snack, enough is made for all the children with extra for the child to take home.

A variation to this reward is ordering the two-for-one pizza deals every other week to celebrate the number of books borrowed. The family who has borrowed the most books takes home the extra pizza.



### **Motivator #5: Books for Birthdays**

Children receive books for their birthdays. When parents see their child's face light up as they receive a new book, parents learn that books are valuable.

### **Motivator #6: Book Draws**

Draw for books for parents and children who have reached a pre-determined goal.

### **Motivator #7: Book Buddies:**

Have a couple of children take home the same book. While both parents are present, incidentally ask about the book. They will both engage in the conversation making it more appealing to them.



**Notes:**



### **Motivator #8: You oughtta be in pictures!**

Pictures of parents reading to their children are posted on the bulletin board. They will read so they can have their picture taken.

### **Motivator #9: Book Blurbs**

Centres have daily information sheets that staff fill out for parents to read regarding the child's activities during the day. Staff post sticky notes on these sheets with little messages such as "Have you read any good books lately?" and "Josh really enjoyed reading Red is Best. Why don't you take it home to read?". Parents enjoy getting these notes and are quick to sign out a book.



## Parent Advisory Committee (PAC)

Having parents form an advisory committee helps to engage them in the work of planning, fundraising, and maintaining the Book Club, its space and its books. They can provide input; and support you in your work. At the same time, they are developing their own social connections.

To get it off to a strong start, it's important to have people with good leadership strengths - people who relate well to others, who carry through with what they promise, and who aren't afraid to go the extra mile. Invite two or three of these parents to meet with you to talk about a Parent Advisory for the Book Adventures Club.



Apply your best instincts as to how best to proceed.

How the PAC sets itself up depends entirely on your particular context and the people involved - there are no rigid rules around this!

Do insist that people are clear about who will do what, and then provide whatever support they need to get it done. Be sure to recognize - and celebrate - successes!

### **PAC: Some questions you might consider:**

- ◇ Which kinds of decisions or activities should the PAC be involved in?
- ◇ What should your role be in relation to the PAC? Should you always be with them when they meet?
- ◇ Is fundraising something you want this group involved with?
- ◇ What will you do to ensure this doesn't appear to other parents, as favouritism?
- ◇ How can you build in a 'changing of the guard' regularly, to keep ideas fresh?



## Monthly Learning Calendar

A monthly calendar is sent home at the beginning of each month. Each day has a simple activity for parents and children to do together in addition to reading. A “Rhyme of the Week” is printed on the back of the calendar. Separate calendars are made for each age group.

Calendar activities can match the weekly theme.

Parents are encouraged to make sure it is a fun time with their child and to do each activity several times that day.

Here is an excerpt from a toddler calendar:

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Rhyme of the week: Humpty Dumpty						
Count the windows in your home.	Find things that are round.	Talk about what you see out the window.	Make animal sounds.	Find big and little things.	Point to and name facial features.	Count the number of steps from one room to another.

## Handouts

Provide copies of easy-to-read handouts. Display them and make them available for parents to take home and read.

- ◇ Post on the bulletin board
- ◇ Assemble several handouts into file folders. Place in a table-top or wall-mounted file holder.

Assemble in binders. The master sheet is in a plastic sleeve and take-home copies are clipped into the binder.



## **Suggestion Box**

A suggestion box is set up to allow parents to privately ask questions about literacy and language development and reading with their children. The staff member in charge of the Book Adventures Club provides an answer based on her knowledge, searching the internet and books and using other resources. The answers are posted on the bulletin board in the room. Copies are posted so that parents can take articles home to read. See the FAQ's section on the next page for some of the questions.



## **Staff as an Information Source**

As you develop trusting, comfortable relationships with parents, you become an important resource of information on literacy and language development. Nurture this relationship! These parents need your help.

Introduce materials to a parent in a casual, personal way. "You may enjoy this, It's about..." or "This article reminded me of (her child's name)." This gives her information, but, more importantly, self esteem - you've been thinking about her and her child!



## **Library Days**

Many young parents do not go to the public library. Transportation and time are issues. It is not something they did as children and they are uncomfortable. Library days are arranged for parents and their children to go on a tour of the library and have story time. They are given information on library programs and invited to fill out an application for a library card. Library information and library card applications are also shared with the parents at the centres. Homecare providers visit the library weekly with the children and share information with the parents.



## Parents' Frequently Asked Questions...and Comments

*How do I get my child to sit still for a book?*

- ◇ Keep trying extending the length of time each time you read
- ◇ Let your child pick the book
- ◇ Most important, reading needs to be a pleasure. Don't force a child to participate -- but try to build it into a normal quiet time.

*My child picks boring books.*

- ◇ You may think it is boring but your child doesn't
- ◇ Make exciting: puppets, funny voices

*What do I do when I don't know the words?*

- ◇ look at the pictures and make up your own story
- ◇ point at things in the picture and label them

*I don't like to read.*

- ◇ tell a story about what you did that day
- ◇ make up a story using the things your child like
- ◇ use a photo album

*My child wants to read the same book over and over.*

- ◇ Repetition is an important element of brain development -- in other words, it's OK!

*How do I read this to him? (Parents will bring books from home and ask this)*

- ◇ make up the story using the pictures
- ◇ importance of togetherness
- ◇ keep the child involved in the story "What's that?" and "What's going to happen next?"
- ◇ tell stories
- ◇ read part of the story and let the child finish the sentence
- ◇ The book is too long and I don't feel like reading the whole thing.



*What happens if I make a mistake?*

- ◇ your child won't know
- ◇ you don't need to read the book word for word



***As an educator, you have a good sense of what these learners need. Trust your training - and your instincts!***

## **Responding to needs**

Parents' questions often blossom into a "mini-lesson".

Common questions revolve around:

- ◇ "normal" book behaviour of children
- ◇ attention span
- ◇ choosing age-appropriate books
- ◇ recognizing when your child has had enough
- ◇ using booktime as a predictable and enjoyable routine at bed or bathtime, on the bus, etc.
- ◇ how to use older books for babies and baby books for preschoolers



Parents, even if they are not confident readers, are encouraged to use the skills they have to enjoy a book with their child:

- ◇ point and label objects and actions in the pictures
- ◇ make up stories using the pictures
- ◇ tell stories without using a book
- ◇ "read" a family photo album
- ◇ sing and rhyme
- ◇ allow the child to "read" to the parent

***You set the example.***

***Parents will learn these skills by observing you.***



## **Presentations for parents:**

Parents are more receptive to presentations after they have gotten to know and trust the staff. Parents hear the presentation in the comfort of their classroom. Occasionally they can attend a presentation after school - and they'll be there, if it's interesting and rewarding for them.

Here are some topics that you might consider:

### *What is Literacy?*

◇ Literacy is a combination of what is taught directly and what occurs naturally through daily activities and interaction with children



- ◇ Nurturing early literacy
- ◇ Simple, at-home ideas and activities

### *Booktimes*

- ◇ Spending time with children, talking and listening and having fun with books
- ◇ Importance of cuddling, giggling and games
- ◇ Strengthening the parent-child relationship

## **Home Activities**

Many web sites provide learning activities for parents and children. These activities can be photocopied for parents to take home.

### **Suggested web sites:**

<http://www.ed.gov/Family/RSRforFamily/>

<http://www.ed.gov/Family/RSRforCaregvr/>

<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/startearly/>

<http://www.ed.gov/Family/RWN/Activ97/resource.html>

<http://kidsource.com/kidsource/content/learread.html>

<http://www.ed.gov/inits/americanreads/index.html>

### *Ages and Stages*

- ◇ Book behaviour at different ages
- ◇ Things for parents to try when reading: different voices, running finger under words, talking about the front cover, using picture clues.



## *The Learning Continues....*

*The early momentum of your work with books is best maintained with constant care and feeding! Workshops and other learning opportunities will help to keep the excitement - and commitment - at a high level. For parents, the positive support that comes with extra social interaction is a bonus.*

### *For parents:*

After-school workshops are very appealing, on a no-fee basis, and with daycare and a nutritious snack provided.

Various organizations in the community offer a range of materials, events, and other learning opportunities that appeal to parents. A look at a directory of services in the community yields a list of possible resources, available to anyone who asks.

Be ready to recommend courses and programs to your families. Be on the watch for topics such as:

- ◇ parent-child relationships
- ◇ social and language development
- ◇ brain development
- ◇ literacy and language development
- ◇ fun and easy ways to read books to children.

The parents take many easy ideas home to try with their children.

Cooking Circles, offered in many communities, are an excellent time for conversations about literacy and language development. The professional conducting the sessions can initiate and guide a conversation about the research.

### *For Staff:*

Resources abound! Watch for program offerings at Early Childhood or Early Years centres, public libraries, and other agencies and organizations that work with young families.



## Evaluating Your Book Adventure

The Book Adventures Club does not undergo a formal evaluation. It is more of a conversation between parents and staff to find out how the parents see the program working for them. Parents also provide input through the Parent Advisory Committee

**The Book Adventures Club should be a regular topic at staff meetings. Staff can report what they have heard from parents.**



There are many kinds of help and support available to you. Keep your eyes open for opportunities to link up with other organizations, including businesses, with whom you could join forces for mutual benefit. Book stores, toy stores, and talk through possibilities, and be clear about the roles and responsibilities of each player on 'the team'.

Businesses with products and services for families with young children will often be interested. Try book stores, toy stores, and department stores marketing children's clothing and furniture. A simple conversation can often lead to donations, discounts, and sponsorships.

Talk to people in other agencies working with young parents; talk to the parents themselves about where they think help might be found!

**Partnerships: "It takes a whole village to raise a child."**

