



*I can help my child be a reader!*

LESSONS FOR PARENTS IN SUPPORTING EARLY LITERACY





## INTRODUCTION

*Whatever you do, wherever you are,  
talk and read with your child.*

### MANUAL OVERVIEW

We are excited to bring you these materials designed to help parents play an important role in starting their children down the path to becoming readers. These materials were designed to accompany two training series for early care and education providers: *Every Child Reads: Birth to Three* and *Every Child Reads: Three to Five Years*. While these two series train early care and education professionals to provide experiences young children need to develop essential skills that lead to later reading readiness, it is important to understand the vital role parents play as their children's first and most important teacher. The six lessons included here help parents appreciate the kinds of evidence-based practices that support early literacy. They also pave the way so parents themselves can support their children. Together, both parents and early care and education providers lay a crucial foundation for literacy that help ensure all children are reading by third grade. These lessons replace the original parent training modules that were supplemental materials provided as part of the first edition of *Every Child Reads: Three to Five Years*.

The materials were field tested in several sites across Iowa for three years with well over 50 parents. Based on feedback from the parents and presenters, we developed this manual to help parents better support the early literacy development of their children.

### WHO SHOULD ATTEND THIS TRAINING?

The six lessons are to be presented in a group setting to families with children ages 2-3 years old. Some of the activities and messages may need to be modified if the ages of children are not in this range. However the main messages of talking with children and reading to children are important at any age.



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### WHY TEACH THESE STRATEGIES TO FAMILIES?

The foundations of literacy are oral language and early reading experiences. Reading research shows that oral language proficiency is an important predictor of later reading success (Storch & Whitehurst, 2002; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). The amount of talking infants, toddlers and young children hear and respond to is associated with vocabulary development and other language skills (Hart & Risley, 1995). What is even more important is that these foundations are built primarily by parents simply because they have the most time, inclination and opportunity to be reading and talking with their children. They are, as the expression goes, their child's first and most important teacher. The question is whether they are effective teachers.

The purpose of the six *I can help my child be a reader!* lessons are to provide clear and direct recommendations so parents will adjust their interactions with their children in small but significant ways thereby becoming more effective teachers of their children.

Being effective does not mean heavy-handed lecturing or the monotonous drilling of skills. Good teaching should be fun, engaging and supportive of the parent-child relationship. Indeed, the reason parents play such an important role is because they are the most important person in the child's life. The attachment between parent and child is the essential ingredient in the healthy development of all children. Their relationship, expressed through nurturing, caring and responsive interactions, is the basis for all learning a child does, including literacy. So encouraging parents to read and talk more with their children should build on and reinforce this foundation.

Besides engaging in frequent conversations, the other valuable thing parents can do is read with children. It can start as early as a mom or dad can hold a baby in her or his lap. Children with rich and frequent reading



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experiences, especially by parents, are more likely to become proficient readers by third grade (Bus, van IJzeendoorn & Pelligrini, 1995). These authors note in their analysis of 41 research studies that the benefit seen from reading was consistent regardless of the social or economic status of the family and included outcomes such as reading achievement, emergent literacy and language skills.

Our dual focus on talking and reading with children are the core learning objectives in these lessons. Not only are they both important, but parents skilled at frequent and lengthy conversations with their children are more likely to practice those skills while they read. In doing so, they are actually engaging in dialogical reading strategies that also have a solid research base (Dickinson & Smith, 1994). This research showed that talking about the book while reading it and asking questions promoted vocabulary and comprehension. Conversation-rich reading experiences are what makes book-reading so valuable to children's literacy development.

The *I can help my child be a reader!* Lessons promote this basic message of talking and reading with children, supported by simple, memorable strategies, reinforced through practice, that build over time into routine and sophisticated application. The goal is to establish routines of talking and reading as daily habits.

Your role as a trainer is to take these two learning goals and move every participant into deeper and deeper levels of proficiency in use of the strategies that support these goals. You want to ensure as much as possible that the children of each participant are being talked and read to more. Unless children actually experience more conversation and book-reading, there is no reason to think anyone is better off as a result of participation in your training. This may be a strong statement, but the scientific evidence behind what helps and hinders early language and literacy development is remarkably clear on this point. As a result, the sequences, repetitions,



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and explanations are all carefully crafted to achieve this end. And we are confident that attentive trainers, following the recommendations and guidance in these lessons, can see exciting results as they work with parents.

Please note that this work does not have to be done literally with parents. Grandparents, extended family members, even close friends, can all play the role of helping young children become readers. We use the term *parents* throughout these lessons, but trainers should understand their participants can represent a variety of individuals who play an important role in the life of a child.

### ARE THERE CLEAR OUTCOMES FOR EACH LESSON?

Each lesson includes a list of outcomes that indicate not only what parents will learn but that their behavior will change. The purpose of each lesson is to stimulate intentional planning and follow-through so parents will read and talk more with their children, not merely understand that it is important and beneficial to do so. You will note that each outcome repeats and builds on each previous lesson.

### WHY DO YOU INCLUDE BOTH A LESSON OUTLINE AND A FULL TRAINER'S SCRIPT?

During our field testing, trainers ranged widely in experience and comfort-level with training. The outline seemed helpful to experienced trainers who wanted a quick way to see what the main points were, how to sequence them and when to insert activities. Less experienced trainers found it useful to have a step-by-step script. Both the outline and the script are provided for each lesson. Trainers should use either or both depending on their comfort level as a trainer and with the material. Keep in mind the importance of engaging parents throughout by asking questions, having parents share stories and experiences, having them participate in activities, and following their lead and interests.



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### HOW LONG DOES EACH LESSON TAKE:

Each lesson takes approximately one and one-half to two hours. Early literacy information is presented first followed by a parent-child activity.

### TIME WILL VARY DEPENDING ON:

- the size of the audience
- how much the audience contributes to the discussion
- how much the participants already know and understand about early literacy, and
- the parent-child activity selected.

### HOW DO I BEGIN EACH SESSION?

Each lesson should begin in a similar way. The individual outlines and scripts in the modules assume that you have a standard introduction.

A recommended introduction begins with:

- introducing yourself
- asking the participants to introduce themselves
- reviewing the agenda and goals for the session
- presenting any housekeeping information (e.g., when the session starts and ends, how child care arrangements will work, where children will be, when breaks are, locations of restrooms, etc.)
- reviewing the meeting guidelines, and
- conducting a short focus or warm-up activity (a suggestion for one is given at the beginning of each lesson's script.)



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### WHERE CAN I GET VIDEOS?

Many of the lessons recommend the use of videos to provide demonstrations of the recommended strategies. The videos are not included with this manual. In each lesson under the section “What do I need to do to prepare?” there are specific recommendations of videos that will work well in the lesson. Most of these come from two DVDs called *Language is the Key: Talking & Books* and *Language is the Key: Talking & Play*. They can be ordered from:

Washington Learning Systems

2212 Queen Anne Avenue North, #726

Seattle, Washington 98109

(206) 310-7401

Fax (206) 283-9243

Website: <http://www.wlearning.com/products/language-is-the-key/>

We recommend you purchase these or borrow them from your local Iowa Area Education Agency. They were also widely distributed during earlier releases of the *Every Child Reads* training materials. If you cannot access these DVDs, you may be able to find suitable alternative video clips online. Each lesson’s Trainer’s Script includes descriptions of what the video should contain so you can find an appropriate alternative clip. Look for the video clip icon  to quickly find where video clips are used in the Trainer’s Script. A shorter description is also compiled in the “What do I need to do to prepare?” section in each lesson.

Another alternative is to do role plays with participants and/or trainers and use that as the basis for discussion. Be aware that sometimes participants find performing in front of their peers makes them anxious, and they may be put off if asked to do so.



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### WORKING WITH CHILDREN

These lessons assume that you will provide child care so parents can better participate in the lesson activities. The lessons bring the children into the meeting at an appropriate time so parents can practice the strategies with them. Providing time for interactive literacy activities allows you to observe how parents are using the strategies with their children and assess how effectively you are teaching the strategies for each parent to use with their actual children. Providing scheduled, routine interactive literacy activities is an essential ingredient in family literacy programs (Darling, 1992). If providing child care is not possible, we recommend these lessons be provided without children present to allow the adult family members to concentrate on the presentation.

### IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

- Books appropriate to the age of the children are to be distributed to each family at each lesson. Providing books is a great incentive for attendance, builds the families' libraries and signals the value you place in books. You may distribute the same book to each family or different ones. If you don't have books available, consider conducting your meetings at a library so parents can check out books for their children. Making sure parents have access to books is important to the success of these lessons.
- Make the meetings interesting and fun for parents! They learn more if they are able to have a conversation with the trainer and each other rather than sitting quietly listening to a lecture. Ask questions and tell some stories and anecdotes of your own experiences when it is appropriate to do so.



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These icons will appear in each script along the left column of the Trainer's Script when an indicated item should be used. Trainer Actions also appear in the left column. Text in the right column of the Trainer's Script provides the content to share with participants.



RECORD INFORMATION



READ A BOOK



WATCH TIME



DISTRIBUTE MATERIAL



VIDEO CLIP



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