Early Literacy Newsletter

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What is Early Literacy?

Early Literacy is what children know about reading and writing before they can actually read and write. Research shows that children get ready to read years before they start school. There are five early literacy practices that parents can incorporate into their children's daily life.
These five practices are:
Talking, Writing, Reading, Playing, and Singing

This newsletter's purpose is to help parents of children from birth to age five put early literacy principles into practice. You can help your baby, toddler and preschooler learn important skills now so they can become good readers.

Over the course of the next five newsletters we will look at how the basic concepts of Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math (STEAM) can be incorporated with early literacy activities!

What is STEAM? "STEAM" stands for science, technology, engineering, art, and math. For young children, we focus on STEAM through exploration, play and building curiosity about the world and the way things work. The real-life skills that people develop when learning STEAM help make them better problem-solvers and learners.

This issue is all about:
Early Literacy and Engineering

Engineering for young children is defined as a way of doing. It is solving problems, using a variety of materials, designing and creating, and building things that work. Developing these skills is essential for later learning and affect academic success across all areas, including learning to read and write.

Engineering activities that promote literacy:

- Make solving problems a part of your day. Have your child come up with ideas of how to transport water from the sink to the plants on the shelf or how to repair a broken toy.
- Do cooking and baking activities with your child. Children are highly engaged in problem solving when they do every-day activities like cooking.
- Give your child a variety of items to play and explore with such as cardboard, empty ribbon spools, corks, glass beads, card board tubes, rocks, cupcake liners, popsicle sticks and shells. Loose parts allow children opportunities to design, build, create and problem solve.
- Blow bubbles together. Use wands of varying shapes and sizes or build your own bubble wands using straws, pipe cleaners, or other materials and see what happens! Blow hard and soft, wave the wand fast and slow. What works? What doesn't? Talk together about your discoveries.
- Give your child toothpicks and mini marshmallows and allow them to create a tower. It will be amazing to see what they design! And as they pick up the marshmallows they will be strengthening their finger muscles, getting their hands ready for holding a pencil.
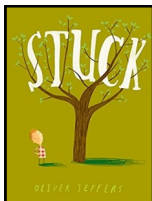
Talking | Singing | Reading | Writing | Playing

Here are some engineering activities to do that go along with the five early literacy practices !

Talking

Resist the urge to solve children's problems for them. Many adults respond almost automatically to young children's problems. Before responding, adults should do a quick assessment and determine whether the problem is one that the child might reasonably be able to solve on his or her own or with a small amount of adult support. If so, a better response might be, "I see you have a problem. What are you going to do about that?" Talk about it with your child and come up with some ideas. Try the ideas together and see if they work. If they don't, talk about why they didn't work and come up with some other ideas. When you do this, you are engaging your child in engineering without them even knowing it! The book, *Stuck* by Oliver Jeffers, is a funny story about a little boy who has to figure out how to get his kite unstuck and ends up getting all kinds of other things stuck too. Read to find out if he ever solves the problem and gets his kite back.

Writing

Scribble drawings are a fun activity to do with your child that practices writing skills while engaging the mind in creating, designing and problem solving. Draw a scribble on a piece of paper. Then have your child look at the scribble and add their own drawings and marks to turn the scribble into something else. Let your child take a turn making a scribble and then you take a turn changing it into something else! Then, read *Tiz & Ott's Big Draw* by Bridget Marzo and see how these two characters use doodles, scribbles, scrawls and splotches to create a world of their own!
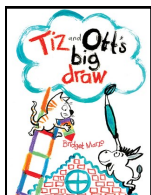
Reading
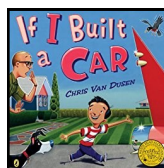
Reading fun books that have a building theme like *If I Built a Car* by Chris Van Dusen, introduces children to the process of Engineering - designing, creating and coming up with innovative ideas - which will in turn inspire them to think more like an Engineer and will foster creativity and imagination!

Singing

Sing and act out this song about Engineers with your child. It will help them understand and remember what Engineers do and remind them that when they explore, create and make things better they are Engineers too!

We are Engineers
(tune: Farmer in the Dell)
We are Engineers (one thumb in to chest)
We are Engineers (second thumb in to chest)
We can solve problems because
(march in place)
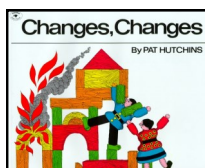We are Engineers (both thumbs in to chest)

First we explore (shade eyes and look around)
Then we create (wave hands in front of body)
Improve to make it better
(wiggle hands high above head)
'Cause Engineers are great!
(march in place then jump!)

Playing

Playing with blocks provides children with the opportunity to exercise a variety of skills that will help them later in life. Blocks encourage social, emotional, physical, and cognitive skills. They also encourage engineering skills such as problem solving, designing and creating. Read the book *Changes, Changes* by Pat Hutchins, a wordless picture book about a wooden couple living in a building block house. One day it catches on fire, causing them to problem solve and create something new out of the blocks. This book not only demonstrates problem solving, it can also give inspiration for your child's block building play!