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EDUCATION

5 easy things parents can do to promote early literacy

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TALK IT UP >> Children begin acquiring language skills at birth, so parents should talk to children as much as they can, telling stories and cracking jokes. Children from lower-income homes may hear 30 million fewer words by age 3 than children from higher-income homes, studies show, so this could be a key way to close the kindergarten readiness gap.

BEDTIME STORY >> Reading aloud to children is a critical way to plant the seeds of literacy. Cuddling together with parents over a book every day helps children associate reading with warmth and happiness. Make this a special, fun time that everyone looks forward to. Ham it up with funny voices. Engage children by talking about the characters and getting their opinions on what makes a great yarn.

DON'T PUSH IT >> Keep it fun and don't put pressure on kids to sound things out before they are ready. Try to pick out books they like, even if that means books about farting or poop, and be prepared to read them over and over because children love repetition. Conversely, put the book away for a while if your child loses interest in the story or is having trouble paying attention.

BE ARTY >> Try setting up an art and writing space somewhere with paper, markers and crayons where children can feel free to scribble or draw or color. This helps develop hand/eye coordination and motor skills that will be vital to later development.

GET MESSY >> Toddlers may have more fun learning their letters if they can trace them out with their finger in shaving cream or whipping cream. Then they smooth it out and do it again. You can also use popsicle sticks to cut down on the mess. *Contact Rebecca Parr at 510-293-2473.*