



Issue Seven

Supporting Early Learners

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Dear Parents,

Children have the best possible chance to reach their full potential when educators and parents work as partners to provide supportive learning environments. These newsletters have been written by Bev DeMonyé and Gloria Gustafson for parents wanting to help their children at home. You are welcome to email us at learningtoread@telus.net or visit our website www.readwritewithkids.com to view other resources.

Becoming a Better Writer

Early learners grow as writers when they write often, receive lots of encouragement and have one on one support. This helps them become better writers every time they write. We believe parents can support their children's writing through '**gentle guidance**.' We use the term '**gentle guidance**' to remind ourselves that it is important to set realistic expectations and acknowledge that writing is hard work and improvement is made in small steps. We need to be mindful that children at this age can only stay with a difficult task for a short period of time. It is important that children begin to see themselves as authors who can enjoy and use writing to communicate.

Two of the most powerful '**gentle guidance**' tools you can use to support your child are making reading and writing connections and talking and writing together throughout the writing process.

Making Reading and Writing Connections

- Children who hear and read well-written stories with correct grammar and interesting sentence and story structures develop a sense of what sounds right. This 'sense' will help them when they tell you or write their own stories.
- You can help your child develop knowledge about story structure by talking about what happened at the beginning, middle and end of the story. Talk about what the problem was and how it was solved, the characters and how they related to each other and the setting which is where and when the story took place.
- Learning to spell is a natural process from invented spelling to conventional spelling. The best way to encourage conventional or correct spelling of words is through reading. Every time children see a word spelled correctly, the visual image of that word is imprinted in their memory. This leads to being able to spell the words correctly or the recognition that words need correcting. Learning to spell is developmental just like walking and talking. Relax! Your child will get there.

- Reading to children allows them to hear and learn sophisticated vocabulary they can use in their conversations and writing.
- Read and enjoy a descriptive passage with your child. Try having them close their eyes and make a picture in their mind. Explain to your child that adding details and interesting words are tools that real authors use to help readers create better mind pictures. You can encourage your child to add colour, size, shape or feeling words so their sentences are more descriptive and make better mind pictures.
For example: *See my house.* might become: *See my blue house with the pretty flowers in the garden.*

Talking and Writing Together Throughout the Steps of Writing

Prewriting: Thinking about a topic and gathering ideas and information

- talk about the topic, learn about the subject, make a list of ideas, draw a web or diagram of ideas or facts or use a picture as a springboard for discussing what your child might want to write about

Organizing: Possibilities include lists, diagrams, charts, poems, drawings with labels, sentences and paragraphs

- simple stories need a beginning, middle and end
- information writing needs a main idea with supporting details

Drafting: Getting it down the first time

- talk it through first and use probing questions to get your child thinking before they write
- discuss with your child where descriptive words or details could be added

Revising and editing: Greatest learning occurs when we work on a draft to make it better

- use the two stars and a wish approach. That is, tell your child two things you really like about their writing and one thing you wish they would change. The wish could be a spelling correction, a grammar correction, adding a more interesting word or detail or combining two short sentences into a longer sentence using connecting words such as *and*, *but*, *then*, *now* or *so*. Some days your child can handle more than one 'wish' and some days they can't handle even one. Do what works best for you and your child.

Proofreading: Checking for spelling, punctuation and grammar

- good writers proofread as they write and then again after making a final copy for sharing

Publishing or Sharing: At this age young learners publish in many ways to share their writing. They love to see their work displayed.

- family sharing is an opportunity to have your child's writing honoured and celebrated
- writing can be illustrated and collected in booklets for rereading
- technology offers early learners many exciting opportunities. Explore and take advantage!

