

Using the practice Early literacy

This resource outlines some strategies to embed early literacy in your early childhood education and care setting.

Engage in sustained shared conversations with children

One way to develop early literacy in children is to engage in ‘sustained shared conversations’. **The Early Years Learning Framework** states that sustained shared conversations are an important strategy for educators and teachers to employ. By asking children questions, educators can prompt children to explore their ideas in more depth. Educators can extend children’s thinking by working together to solve a problem, clarify an issue, evaluate learning experiences or extend a narrative. Opportunities for engaging in sustained shared conversations can occur throughout the day during routines, transitions, planned and spontaneous experiences.

Strategies and examples for engaging in sustained shared conversations with children aged 3-5 years are outlined in the following table. For examples of sustained shared conversations that develop children’s numeracy and executive function and self-regulation skills, see [numeracy](#) and [executive function and self-regulation](#) resources.

Strategy	Question stems to encourage conversations	Examples
Prompt children to explain their thinking.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘How did you know...?’ • ‘Why does this...?’ • ‘Why do you think...?’ • ‘Why can’t we...?’ • ‘What happens next?’ 	‘How did you know you need to wear a life jacket when you are on a boat?’ [child’s response] ‘That is interesting, what do you think a life jacket is for?’
Help children to think through alternatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘I wonder what would happen if...?’ • ‘What is another way we could try...?’ 	‘I wonder what would happen if it started raining?’ [child’s response] ‘How can we still go outside if it is raining?’ [child’s response] ‘What do we need to wear?’

Strategy	Question stems to encourage conversations	Examples
Encourage children to elaborate, recap, and clarify ideas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'I really want to know more about...' • 'So, you think that...' 	<p>'I have a younger brother! Who else has a brother?' [child's response]</p> <p>'Tell me about your brother.' [child's response]</p> <p>'What does he look like?'</p>
Offer suggestions to help children extend their ideas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Could we try doing it this way...?' • 'What if you...?' • 'I find it useful when...' • 'Have you thought about trying...?' 	<p>'You've made an interesting sculpture. How are you going to transfer it over to the display stand?' [child's response]</p> <p>'It is rather large. Do you think we will need more than one person to carry it?'</p>
Provide examples of how to problem solve and model your thinking.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'I have to think hard about...' • 'I need to...' • 'First I will ... and then I will ... and then I can...' 	<p>'The little boy in the book tried to find his lost kitten. Let's think about different ways he could do this. First, I might talk to my neighbours to see if they have seen the kitten. Then I would make a missing cat poster. What information would we need to put on the poster?'</p>
Show genuine interest and provide encouragement for further thinking.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'That's an interesting idea!' • 'I like what you have done.' • 'You have thought really hard about ... what can you do next?' 	<p>'Look at the great cave you have built! It looks like the cave we just read about in our story! What could you do next to make it feel like home for the bear?'</p>

Embed literacy learning throughout the day

Here are some examples of when you might build early literacy skills into different learning experiences and interactions throughout the day with children aged 3-5. These examples show how you may start a conversation and illustrate a pause where the child can engage and steer the conversation with their response. You can use these examples as inspiration for conversation starters with your children.

Moments in the day	Example of how to build in literacy	What this might sound like with children
Drop off	Ask the child/ren how they are feeling and what they would like to do today, or talk about their current interest.	<p>'I see that there is a monkey on your shirt!</p> <p>[child's response]</p> <p>'Did you know that monkeys live in lots of different habitats?'</p> <p>[child's response]</p> <p>'I wonder what else you already know about monkeys.'</p>
Mealtime	Talk about the food you are preparing, what you're doing to it, how it tastes and what it looks like.	<p>'Today we are having frittata for lunch. How does it taste?'</p> <p>[child's response]</p> <p>'What are some of your favourite things to have in a frittata?'</p>
Planned and spontaneous experiences	Encourage children to show their understanding of a story through acting out the story, or through art.	<p>'Do you remember what made the kangaroo curious?'</p> <p>[child's response]</p> <p>'Yes, he spotted something in the grass. What colour are you going to choose to draw the grass?'</p>

Moments in the day	Example of how to build in literacy	What this might sound like with children
Planned and spontaneous experiences	Provide opportunities for children to develop an understanding of books and other texts.	‘This is the cover of the book and here is the title. These words tell us what the story is called.’
		‘Let’s use the map to try and find the city that we live in! Can you see how each town is labelled with its name? What town are we looking for?’
		‘The label is listing all of the ingredients so we know what is in it!’ [child’s response] ‘That is right. It is also showing us the quantities, and cooking directions.’ [child’s response] ‘See here? It says: two tablespoons.’
		‘Would the rabbit like more carrots? What else would the rabbit like to eat?’
	Encourage children to share what they are doing and thinking.	‘Where are the dolls going today?’ [child’s response] ‘Who are they with?’ [child’s response] ‘How will they get there?’
	Provide opportunities for social interactions where children can practice speaking and listening and see how written words are used in our lives.	‘Let’s go to the shop. What do we need to take with us to remember what to buy?’ [child’s response] ‘Let’s write a list of groceries to buy. What should we put on it?’ [child’s response] ‘We’ve arrived at the shop, let’s say, ‘Good morning ... we would like to buy some food today.’ [child’s response] ‘Can I please buy these items? How much does this cost?’

Moments in the day	Example of how to build in literacy	What this might sound like with children
Planned and spontaneous experiences	Build on children’s vocabulary in all learning experiences including those with science or maths focus.	‘This is the plant’s stem. Can you see in the centre the flower has a stamen?’
		‘That hole is so big! You could also say it’s enormous. What other words could you use to explain how big it is?’
		‘Do you think the car will go faster down this ramp or that one?’ [child’s response] ‘Why do you think it will do this?’ [child’s response] ‘This is called predicting.’
	Provide opportunities for children to hear how sounds in words rhyme.	‘I’ve got my hat. Can you tell me another word that rhymes with hat?’ [child’s response] ‘Yes, cat rhymes with hat.’
		‘I’m making a sausage with my playdough. S-s-s-sausage starts with an “s” sound.’
	Let children experiment with a wide range of resources to practice mark making.	‘I like how you are using your fingers to draw patterns in the sand. This looks like a letter “O” for Olivia.’
	Include opportunities to develop an understanding of different types and formats of text including digital and print, fiction and non-fiction.	‘This book tells us how plants grow. Can you see the diagram? It tells us the part of the plant and how it changes from a seed.’
‘It is called a recipe. It lists all the ingredients and the amounts. What else does it tell us?’		
Pick up	Help children use the vocabulary they have learned by asking them to describe highlights of the day, and share this with their parents and primary caregivers.	‘What did we learn about today? What did you really enjoy doing today?’
		‘Do you remember what was so special about our trip to the park?’