

## CORE SKILL: COMMUNICATE

# Print Knowledge



### What You Need to Know

In the toddler years, building print knowledge involves helping children see print as something interesting, worth exploring, and having value. It is not unusual for parents and teachers of toddlers to wonder whether a focus on print and print knowledge should wait. Indeed, many young children in their toddler years are focused on simply learning to talk! However, print knowledge development shares a lot with the discoveries that we tend to think of as important during the toddler years, such as learning to play imaginatively and learning to talk. The link among all of these areas (play, print, and oral language) is symbolic development. In fact, symbolic development underlies children’s basic capacity to understand that words represent ideas or things, that random objects such as a block or a stick can transform into play toys (e.g., a car or a kitchen spoon), and that print transforms into communication and the words we say. Building toddlers’ abilities to notice print and think of print as something that stands for something else is a huge discovery – a foundation upon which more specific knowledge about print will build during the preschool and elementary years.

### Things to Consider

Young children are particularly drawn to the print that they see every day, such as signs, logos, newspapers, food packages, and print in media. These print artifacts – collectively called **environmental print** – draw children’s attention because they tend to be colorful, have interesting fonts, and are often embedded in pictures. Just like books, environmental print offers opportunities for making the most of young children’s natural curiosity and interest to promote literacy development.

### Development of Print Knowledge

Between 9 and 18 months, children may:	Between 16 and 36 months, children may:
Hold books, turns pages, and/or look at pictures.	Pretend to read books by turning pages and talking about events in book.
Use sounds, signs, or words to identify actions or objects in books.	Recognize and use some letters (such as in one’s name), numbers, or familiar signs.
Interact with an adult while reading a book by pointing at pictures.	Begin to attribute meaning to some symbols.
Point at or say the name of some symbols, signs, or words in pictures.	

### Setting the Stage

Activities and materials that support the development of print knowledge:

- ◆ **Books:** draw attention to print while reading.
- ◆ **Display** the alphabet, children’s names, and put labels (with included pictures) on objects around the room (e.g., sign for the bathroom, or label bins of art materials).
- ◆ **Include print artifacts** at various centers (e.g., menus, phone books, invitations and cards, and/or catalogues in the play area, charts in the science area, directions and schematics, blueprints, graph paper, and signs in the block area).
- ◆ **Use name labels** to support transitions (e.g., hold up a name to signal that it is time for them to get in line) or activity selections (e.g., put names on a chart or areas to indicate selection).
- ◆ **Use large-print displays**, such as large schedules, easels, chart paper for writing, big books, large calendars, etc. As applicable, incorporate cutouts of environmental print, such as labels from cereal boxes and other breakfast foods for a display related to discussions of meals or nutrition.



# Intentional Teaching Practices to Support Print Knowledge

OBSERVE	<p><b>OBSERVE</b></p> <p>Carefully observe toddlers’ curiosity about print. Notice the extent to which they are drawn to books or magazines and how they hold these artifacts. Do they open and close books and turn pages? Do they point to things on a page (print or pictures)? Maybe some of the toddlers even pretend to “read” – using a different tone of voice (e.g., a “reading voice”) when looking at a book with you. All of these very subtle signs point to a natural interest and growing awareness that print is important, is communicative, and has rules to learn for its use.</p>
FOCUS	<p><b>Notice and Comment on Print</b></p> <p>Explicitly point out print and emphasize print as different than pictures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ “Look, here are pictures of beautiful red, green, and yellow apples! And the print tells us about the apples on this poster (<i>point to the print</i>)! This says, ‘Granny Smith’ (<i>point to the words</i>), so the print tells us the name of the green apple...”</li> <li>◆ “Thank you for putting away the paint brushes into the paint brush bin. You must have seen the picture of the paint brushes here (<i>point</i>). The print (<i>point</i>) also tells us the brushes belong here.”</li> <li>◆ “Let’s walk quietly to the library... Look at the sign! I see pictures of books. And, I see the print that tells us that this is the library!”</li> </ul>
SCAFFOLD I	<p><b>Discuss Print as Useful and Important</b></p> <p>In the context of reading books, signs, or using print artifacts in play, comment on the act of reading and why you are reading.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ “Oh, I am so glad that you pulled this book from the book bin. I love reading this book because it makes me so happy. It tells a story about a mom and a little bear cub!”</li> <li>◆ “We got a letter from the other classroom! I wonder if they have news to share with us? Let’s read our letter and see what news they wanted to share with us!”</li> <li>◆ “Are you going to serve me lunch? Yum... let me read the menu so that I know what choices I have.”</li> </ul>
SCAFFOLD II	<p><b>Label Specific Print Features</b></p> <p>Incorporate specific print “vocabulary” into the discussion of print to help children notice print, become familiar with print terms, and think more about how print is organized. <u>This also includes discussions of letters.</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ “Here is the title of the book, or the name of the book.”</li> <li>◆ “Look at our morning greeting! It has so many words. One, two, three, four, five words! I wonder what it says? Let’s read it!”</li> <li>◆ “Here is your cubby. Look, it has your picture and your name! You can see your name starts with ‘T’ (<i>point to letter</i>). ‘T’ for Tommy! And here you are (<i>pointing to photo of child</i>)!”</li> </ul>
KEEP IT GOING	<p>Consider what you learned from observing children on Monday as well as their reaction to your Focus and Scaffolds. Find ways to build the activities in the Setting the Stage into your regular routines.</p>