



**Cork County Council Library and Arts Service -  
Early Years Literacy Programme  
supporting  
Numeracy, Literacy and Writing skills.**

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Rialtas na hÉireann  
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Welcome to the NEWSTART booklet, an initiative of Cork County Council Library and Arts Service. NEWSTART is an early years library supporting Numeracy, Literacy and Writing skills. It aims to support children with additional literacy needs including dyslexia and dyspraxia incorporating advice and input from registered professionals in the field, delivered via online and print content. This programme is available through all of the library branches and mobile libraries of Cork County Council Library and Arts Service and these locations can be found on our website [www.corkcoco.ie/library-services](http://www.corkcoco.ie/library-services).



(Library customers on the West Cork Mobile Library in Ballydehob, Co Cork  
Photo by Clare Keogh)

## Foreword by Stella O'Malley, psychotherapist and author

Learning that your child has additional needs and needs extra learning support can be an unsettling experience for a parent. Although some parents may feel a sense of relief as they finally have an answer to their questions about their child's developmental progress, others feel anxious and even frightened about how this assessment might impact their child's life. Parents might have felt distressed hearing stories about how other kids are impressively achieving while your child is trying very hard but doesn't seem to be progressing at the same pace. If we parents could do it for them, we would – but we can't. What we can do instead is to help in a different way; we can explain to our children that individual brains can work differently, that some people's brains need alternative tools to process information and that it's more valuable to work with your brain than to try to stuff a square peg into a round hole.

The most helpful approach a parent can take is to neither magnify nor minimise this issue in their child's life. I remember a child describing his mother's "fizzing frustration" as she hovered over his homework. Fizzing frustration won't help a child who is finding their work challenging and so it is better if parents learn to keep perspective about what is important.

It's more valuable if parents can ensure that their child leaves the school system with their ego intact, with a thirst for learning and with the motivation to work hard to achieve their goals. To do this properly parents need to mind their mental health and to mind the mental health of their children. If parents are protective over their own happiness and protective over their children's happiness, then everything else about life will be easier.

Stella O'Malley is a mental health professional, best-selling author, public speaker and a parent with many years' experience working in counselling and psychotherapy. Much of Stella's counselling and teaching work is with parents and young people which culminated in the publication of her two bestselling books 'Cotton Wool Kids' in 2015 and 'Bully-Proof Kids' in 2017.

Stella writes extensively about mental health issues for newspapers and frequently appears on national and local media such as RTE Radio 1, RTE television, TV3, Newstalk, Today FM and BBC Northern Ireland to discuss a broad range of topics such as mental well-being, mindfulness, conflict resolution in the workplace, communication skills, parenting and childhood issues in Ireland today.

More information can be found on her website:  
<http://www.stellaomalley.com/>



## Tips for reading with your pre-school child

- It's never too early to start reading to your child! If you read one picture book every day until they start preschool - your child will have read almost 1000 books. You can borrow 12 books at a time for your child at your local library so no expense involved!
- Share picture-books with your child but don't worry if they get distracted or wander away – that's normal.
- Choose a time that suits both of you. If you or your child is tired it might be better to try another time for the story.
- Give it all of your attention. Don't be distracted by mobile phones or other devices.
- Don't worry about your reading style.

### First Books

- Babies first experience books with their fingers (and mouths!)
- Board books and cloth books make it easy for baby to turn the pages, while bath books are a good option for babies who can't be persuaded not to chew.
- Look for books with clear illustrations, bold colours or real life pictures.
- Books with noises, textures, and mirrors all encourage interaction.

### First Stories

- Choose books with simple, rhythmic language.
- Toddlers love repetition and familiarity.
- Lift-the-flap books add extra mileage.
- Older babies (from 18 months) love slow reading, busy books and finding "hidden" objects on the page.
- Don't be afraid to improvise: if the story is too sophisticated, invent your own based upon the pictures.
- There are lists of recommended reads created by Irish library staff, for children up to the age of 12 years, available at <https://www.librariesireland.ie/services/right-to-read/recommended-reads-for-children>.

Extracted from:

<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/reading-to-babies-a-beginner-s-guide-1.2407512>

## Early literacy/Pre-literacy

Nursery rhymes and action songs are a powerful learning source in early literacy and enable children to become interested in the rhythm and patterns of language. Many nursery rhymes are also repetitive which can support the development of memory. They also boost language development with rhythm and repetition of words and phrases. Numeracy is also developed as many nursery rhymes and action songs contain counting elements such as “Ten Green Bottles” with counting and repetition.

### Four easy ways to introduce rhymes to your child:

Rhymes can be sung or chanted at any time throughout the day. They are short and quick making them easy to slot into the daily routine. Here are 4 easy ways to introduce nursery rhymes into your setting.

1. Choose a simple rhyme and use it to accompany one of your daily routines such as on a walk to the playground.
2. Introduce ‘**Rhyme of the Week**’ and make a point of singing the rhyme 2 or 3 times each day. Most nursery rhymes take no more than 1 or 2 minutes to sing so this is any easy way to build up lots of repetition.
3. Share picture books of rhymes with your children and encourage them to talk about the characters and the events that unfold within the rhyme.
4. Put together a ‘Rhyme Bag’ for children to explore and fill it with rhyme related objects such as puppets, cookie cutters (Five Currant Buns), small world characters, a toy tea-pot and cup and saucer (Polly Put The Kettle On, I’m A Little Teapot) or rubber ducks (Five Little Ducks).

<https://www.pacey.org.uk/news-and-views/pacey-blog/october-2019/the-importance-of-nursery-rhymes-in-early-childhood>

## The benefits of reading with your child

### • Reading Time

Reading with a child is time spent together, time when the parent is focusing solely on their emotional and developmental needs. It is a wonderful way for a parent to get to know their child and to nurture their individual personalities. By paying attention to what they want to read, parents can learn their child’s likes and dislikes.

### • Emotional Health

Talking about feelings through the experiences of characters in stories is an excellent means of communicating with a child and can be a great way to talk about emotional health in a relaxed setting and give children a sense of their place in the world and in their community.



- **Literacy Skills**

Storytelling promotes literacy and language development and gets children ready to start reading, exposing them at an early age to a 'culture of stories' in the home.

- **Educational Benefits**

In terms of academic achievement and excellence, one of the major benefits of reading to preschool children is a resulting higher aptitude for learning in general. Students who are engaged in their reading lives before school are more likely to do well in all spheres of formal education. Parents have the power to boost their child's learning potential by making books an important part of their everyday lives.

- **Speech Skills**

Reading influences basic speech skills. At this young age, children are learning and assimilating critical language skills. By listening to a parent reading, the child is reinforcing the basic sounds that form the language we use every day. If young children are read to on a daily basis they will be more likely to express themselves through language and to relate to others. The interactions between the characters in the stories they read and the sustained one-on-one contact with their parents during story time will help the child gain valuable communication skills.

- **Logic**

Reading will help a child grasp abstract concepts more easily and develop their logical thinking skills. Through exposure to patterned narratives, they will learn to recognise cause and effect. The more they read and are read to, the more the young child will learn to relate the scenarios and stories in books to what is happening in their own world.

- **Concentration**

Reading in a structured daily session will also enhance a child's concentration and self-discipline. Younger children may initially get distracted during story time but as the routine continues, they will learn to focus and concentrate. With reading comprehension comes a stronger sense of self-discipline, a longer attention span and better memory retention. <https://www.librariesireland.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/2018-10/Benefits-of-Reading.pdf>

## How to help your child improve their reading

Many children struggle with reading and a support that may be useful is the “**reading for 10-minutes-a-day routine**”. It requires no training or expensive equipment and gives parents a chance to enjoy quiet interaction with their children that will stand to them in all aspects of learning.

## Seven steps to more fluent reading in 10-minutes-a-day

**1** In a busy home, finding time and space for quiet reading is perhaps the most difficult challenge, but the results are well worth it. Create a spot where reading sessions always happen – a corner of your child’s room for example. Find a time that works, maybe just after dinner or just before bedtime. Even try getting up 10 minutes earlier in the morning.

**2** Choose the right reading material. It has to be interesting but not frustrating. Don’t give a child reading material with content that is too babyish for them. There are books for children whose reading level is behind their interest level. If you can’t get your hands on such material, try compiling material from the internet or newspapers in the form of a project that interests the child.

**3** Start with a conversation. What is this book going to be about? What does the title suggest? What do the pictures suggest? These help children to read with purpose.

**4** Paired reading is when a teacher or parent reads with a child to help model good reading and to support the child’s own efforts. There are several kinds of paired reading – try them all to see what works.

### \* **Assisted reading**

Read a part of the text and let the child take over at an agreed point. You read every second page, for example, or, if the going is very slow, every second paragraph. This can alleviate frustration.

### \* **Chorus reading**

Parent and child read together out loud. This way the child gets a sense of your tone and cadences, where you stop and pause and how you add expression. Listen closely to ensure that your child is able to read with you most of the time. If she is dropping out too frequently the material is too advanced.

### \* **Echo reading**

This is very effective for children experiencing significant difficulties with fluency. First you read the sentence. Then you and the child read the sentence together. Finally the child reads the sentence alone. You are modelling the right way to read, scaffolding the child’s attempt, and then giving the child an independent run at it.

### \* **Shadow reading**

This uses a similar approach, but you use longer blocks of text.

**5** If you look at any reading passage you will find that certain words occur again and again. These are known as high-frequency words (an internet search will find them). For example, the Dolch list contains 100 words that can constitute up to half the words in the material we read. If a child can recognise these words fluently it makes the job of reading much easier. Pay particular attention to these words as they crop up in the text and reinforce them with your child.



**6** If a child is reading without expression or apparent comprehension, but getting the words right, try asking them to read the same paragraph a number of times, but with feeling. You can model this for them. This can even be fun if you really exaggerate, use accents and hand gestures.

**7** Finish the session with discussion and praise. Even if you have only succeeded in reading a few lines in your session, talk to your child about the meaning of what you have just read. This conversation extends vocabulary, aids comprehension and whets their appetite for the next session.

Extract from:

<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/improve-your-child-s-reading-in-10-minutes-a-day-1.554595>

## Help improve your child's numeracy

The following are some opportunities to enhance your child's knowledge and practice skills in numeracy. The adult-child interactions are very important and play is the natural way in which children learn.

### In the Car

- Count the number of red cars, blue cars, silver cars etc. that you see.
- Count vans, tractors, trucks and buses.

### Food Shopping

- Make a shopping list or depending on the age of the child, use a picture list.
- Usually the fruit aisle is the first section you will come across. Children are fascinated by the fruit they know and the fruit they don't know. Name them all.
- Describe the different colours and shapes of fruit.
- Use words such as big, bigger, fresh, frozen, sour or spicy.
- Count how many bottles, tins, and packets are in your basket or trolley.

### Bath time

- Follow children's lead in the bath and name what they are playing with.
- Use words such as floating, splash, flow, waves, bubbles, drops, washing and drying.
- Use different containers to measure and pour water. Young children are learning maths all the time through a wide variety of play experiences.
- Talk about the temperature of the water whether it is cold, colder, warm, and warmer.

### Meal time

- Set the table with your child and count and name the utensils, for example knives, forks, spoons, and plates.



## Baking

- When baking with your child, use different utensils to measure quantities for example teaspoon, tablespoon, cup or kitchen scales.
- Get them to stir, pour and crack eggs.
- Help them follow instructions on a recipe for making something.

## Anytime

- Make household jobs fun. Let your child help you put away their clothes after washing and drying them. Count the items of clothing and name them as you put them away. Together, put pairs of socks together. This activity is a playful way of counting and matching.
- Play guessing games, rhyming games, ball games, board games, and charades.
- Go on nature walks, sound walks, sight walks or colour walks.
- Provide and create props and materials for pretend play. Cardboard boxes are great fun.
- Notice the sizes of objects in the world around you.
- Use a calendar to talk about the date, the day of the week, and the weather.

## Help your child's handwriting

### Make Practicing Fun

Offer your child a special pencil or a rainbow of coloured ones. Don't just give her words to copy. Try simple word puzzles, anagrams, a game of hangman, or ask her to brainstorm lists around a theme to give writing practice a purpose.

### Encourage Drawing and Puzzle Games

In order to develop the physical requirements of writing — holding a pencil correctly, posture, control, dexterity, coordination — the more time your child spends manipulating objects, the better. Even using silverware can help him develop his fine-motor skills.

### Pinpoint the Problem

Common handwriting problems lie in four main areas: letter formation, sizing, spaces between words, and line-alignment. Focus your child's practice on the letters or concepts that challenge her and make sure she's using two hands to control the paper.

### The Right Tools

If your child's struggling with a regular pencil, try a smaller or shorter, kid-sized one. Ensure he has a good eraser handy so he's not afraid of making mistakes.

### Writing Outside the Box

A foggy mirror, patch of mud, or bowl of leftover sauce make great surfaces. Whether your child's practicing with his fingers, a stick, or a pencil, inspiring his creativity will lend appeal to writing.





## Top Tips from O.T. Jess Kennedy

### Coping with Homework/ Study

1. If possible, set up a table in a quiet area facing a blank wall that isn't distracting. This will help with focus and reduce visual distractions.
2. Take one piece of homework out at a time and use a checklist to increase motivation and track progress. Older kids and teenagers could use a 'Time Timer' to help time management.
3. Do some exercise prior to homework or study to support posture, attention and overall well-being.
4. If homework is taking excessively long, communicate with your child's teacher to determine the length of time that should be spent each night.
5. If handwriting is challenging, focus on quality rather than quantity and allow your child to answer verbally if possible.

### Top 5 Favourite Exercises Prior to Homework

The below exercises work on developing a child's shoulder stability, body awareness, strength and they provide sensory input that can help a child's attention, concentration and ability to maintain an upright seated position when doing homework. Adult supervision is required for all exercises.

1. Bear Crawls - Go on all fours on the ground with your hands shoulder width apart. Raise hips so knees are off the ground & there is a slight bend in your knees. Look forward & crawl around in this position, bringing bent knees into the body to move them forward.
2. Frog Leaps: Squat low on heels and place hands on floor. Move the hands & feet forward together with a squat jump. Do 10 in a row.
3. Crab Walking: Reach backwards with arms and put hands flat on the floor behind you. Raise up until the head, neck and body are in a straight line. Walk around in this position without touching your back off the ground for 20 seconds, rest and then go again.
4. Chair Popcorn Push Ups- Hands flat on chair on either side of legs, push through hands & lift body off chair but keep feet on floor. To make harder, lift feet off floor as well x 10.
5. Butterflies - Hold arms straight in front of body, link the thumbs to make an X, palms facing out, make small circles with the hands with the movement coming from the shoulders x10.

## How to Support Organisational Skills

If your child is struggling with organisational skills; don't take for granted that they naturally know how to clean their room, organise their locker or pack their pack. They may need support around how to do these tasks and what steps to take and therefore modelling and coaching is very important until they are independent. If your child finds verbal instructions difficult, then use visual drawings of each step to remind them e.g. draw out the steps for cleaning a room – 1. Put dirty clothes in laundry basket 2. Fold clean clothes and put in drawer. 3. Put away toys etc. Make sure there are designated places for things and clearly label items as this will also really help to develop organisational skills.

Hope you found these tips helpful, for more ideas check out my blog posts on [www. MyOTandMe.com](http://www.MyOTandMe.com)

## My Dyslexia Tutor

### Tips from Dyslexia Tutor, Lorraine O'Donnell

#### Social and emotional well being

- Being dyslexic is hard work, especially if there are co-occurring conditions such as, anxiety or dyspraxia!
- A dyslexic's sensory processing works differently from those who are neural-normative, sensory overload is common.
- Younger children can become overwrought by the amount of information they have to process on an hourly basis, such as, faces, images, objects, words! This can happen for older children too.
- Noisy environments can also be quiet overwhelming, like a busy classroom or a dinnertime kitchen.
- Processing people's voices can be challenging for a person with dyslexia. Trying to adapt to many voices can be exhausting.
- Post-school 'meltdowns' are common. Your child has been working hard all day and now they can take shelter, at home with you.
- Responding well or positively to this emotional outburst can be crucial to how the rest of the evening goes for the entire family.
- Down time is essential. Take your child's lead. Do they take to the trampoline, sit quietly with the family pet, play with siblings or enjoy a little alone time.
- Sensory overload is exhausting; this is time spent recharging batteries in order to be able to focus on homework.



- If this is a daily or regular occurrence consider making a plan with your child to identify go-to strategies to calm them. This plan will support self-regulation. It can make the child feel they have control over this part of the day.
- Always disclose to your child that they are dyslexic. They need to know this information in order to begin to come to terms with it and accept it.
- Be their life coach. Positively encourage all their achievements and small successes. Focus on their strengths and not their weaknesses. Tell them you are proud of them for trying and working hard. They need your reassurance!

### **Communicating with school**

- Dyslexia is not discussed enough, anywhere. Maybe for this reason schools respond in a variety of ways to dyslexia. One way to assist your school and classroom teacher is to create a book of information about your child.
- This is especially handy for primary school children as they transition from one class to another.
- This book will be a compendium of your child and how they experience dyslexia. It might contain the following;
  - Keep the most recent information to the start of the book.
  - Last report card.
  - Recommendations from their educational psychological report only (back pages)
  - Any visits or recommendations from OT's or other support professionals
  - A clear request to not ask your child to read aloud in class.
  - A biography created by you (parent) as you know them best – some things to consider here are, can your child take instructions and action them, can they take notes from the board, can they fill in their homework journal with accuracy, are you concerned about their handwriting, can your child multi-task, such as, listen to the teacher and take notes, are they overwhelmed by noisy classroom activities, where do your child's strengths lie, what are your hopes for this year.
- This is a collection of observations about your child. It is offered in the spirit of enhancing your child's classroom experience and should be received as such.
- Be discerning – don't offer a tome of information. Make it as accessible for the teacher as possible.

### **Homework approaches**

- If homework is taking hours, you need to let the school know this. Some more differentiation or other accommodations will need to be agreed upon, alongside a plan to catch your child up with their peers .
- Book appointments with school as and when you think they are needed
- Do not do your child's homework for them!
- You may scribe for your child but the content needs to come from them.
- Find a quiet place for homework to happen, away from distractions including siblings, the kitchen table and technology.

- When you think they are ready, introduce the setting of time limits on getting work finished – go gently with this as it can backfire!
- Maybe start with introducing timetables for homework. Do this with your child and get their agreement on how they would like to work, for example, get the harder subjects covered first.
- Don't impose your will here, instead you could put this forward as a trial thus letting your child know that you will mix it up in a months' time in order to discover what works best.
- Remember! Consistency is a big challenge for people with dyslexia.

### **Nurturing creativity**

- Creativity is best experienced without rules. This should be undertaken in the spirit of play and experimentation.
- Experiment means, if something isn't working, move on!
- Don't strive for perfection – it doesn't exist!
- When being creative don't correct spelling or fret over handwriting – allow flow to happen!
- Some examples are; reading a book and instead of writing a report or summary your child could draw it, or create a series of drawings like a storyboard.
- Dramatising homework can also be a great way to learn, for example, playing shop to hone addition skills.
- Use Multiplication Squares to support memory - Colour can highlight patterns like those found in times tables.
- Use plastic letters to support spelling list learning – this is a multi-sensory approach where the child is using touch and sight to learn. Likewise, with plastic numbers.
- Colour pens and sticky notes will support organising thoughts to create an essay. Each paragraph takes a colour and thoughts and ideas can be coded and organised in this way.
- Many children with dyslexia can be fidgety. Get them moving. Standing at a white/black board to work on their spelling list or a treasure hunt around the house for plastic letters to spell out a word.
- Enrolling your child in a creative pursuit can open their neural pathways to creativity. Hobbies or afterschool programs such as drama workshops or art clubs or writing circles can be a great way to nurture their innate creativity.

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## Resources and useful websites

- Touch Type Read Spell (TTRS), is an online multi-sensory course that teaches touch-typing, reading and spelling at the same time and can be used to make learning more accessible for individuals with Down Syndrome, Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADD/ADHD, motor skills difficulties and physical impairments. Free access to this software for library members is available from Cork Council Library and Arts Service branch libraries. Library contact details are available at –

[www.corkcoco.ie/library-services](http://www.corkcoco.ie/library-services)

- Videos with practical tips and interviews with Lorraine O'Donnell, Dylexia Tutor, and Jess Kennedy, OT are available at Cork County Council Library and Arts Service website –

[www.corkcoco.ie/library-services/young-members](http://www.corkcoco.ie/library-services/young-members)

- The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has developed a number of resources to help you support your child's learning in primary school. At the following website you will find a leaflet called "New Primary Language Curriculum for English and Irish - Junior Infants to Sixth Class" It is available in several languages – Irish, Lithuanian, Latvian, Portuguese, Polish, Romanian, Russian and Mandarin Chinese -

<https://ncca.ie/en/primary/resources-for-parents>

- The following HSE leaflet recommends OT strategies commonly used to develop your child's handwriting skills -

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/lho/corknorthlee/therapy/paediatric-occupational-therapy/paediatric-occupational-therapy-handwriting-skills.pdf>

- **The following websites are also useful for developing numeracy in children -**

[www.helpmykidlearn.ie](http://www.helpmykidlearn.ie) - The website's purpose is to provide fun activities that parents can do with their children to develop their literacy and numeracy. It includes general information, fun activities and useful tips. Help My Kid Learn is a website where people can see that supporting a child's literacy and numeracy development is a natural, easy and fun activity that can be integrated into any part of their day.

<https://ie.ixl.com/> - IXL focuses on encouraging children to have fun while learning maths. The website is directly aligned to the Irish primary, Junior Cert and Leaving Cert curriculums, offering endless practice problems and exercises. The site caters for students at all levels, ranging from junior infants up to fifth year. IXL offers kids a chance to learn basic and more complicated maths skills in a fun and exciting way. Site membership fees apply (starts at €9.95 per month).

- **The Dolch List of High Frequency Sight Words is available at - <http://www.dolchword.net/dolch-word-list.html>**
- **Children's Book Events and Recommendations in Ireland**  
Children's Books Ireland is the national children's books organisation of Ireland. Through their many activities and events they aim to engage young people with books, foster a greater understanding of the importance of books for young people and act as a core resource for those with an interest in books for children in Ireland. There are very good recommended reading lists available on this website -  
<https://childrensbooksireland.ie/>
- **Children's Books and Literacy Promotion in the UK – Online story-times**

BookTrust is the UK's largest children's reading charity dedicated to getting children reading. At the following link you will find lots of online story-time videos -  
<https://www.booktrust.org.uk/books-and-reading/have-some-fun/storybooks-and-games/>





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