

Home-School Partnerships: Supporting informal learning at home in the early years

A guide for facilitators



Author: Brigid Comrie



Psychosocial Wellbeing For All Children

REPSSI is a regional non-governmental organisation working with partners to promote psychosocial care and support (PSS) for children affected by HIV and AIDS, poverty and conflict in East and Southern Africa.

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Jonathan Morgan

Editor, REPSSI Psychosocial Wellbeing Series

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Symphaxis

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Foreword

WORDWORKS is a non-profit organisation in South Africa whose primary aim is to support the literacy and language development of young children in disadvantaged communities. Since 2004, we have been working with parents, volunteers and children in libraries and schools in the Cape Town area. Our work has shown that there is a need for locally developed resources to help communities give young children a good foundation for learning to read and write. Together with REPSSI, we have developed two sets of guidelines for supporting early literacy development. These guidelines complement each other and follow the natural progression from informal learning in the home to formal learning at school. They have a similar theoretical basis and share some resources. They are nevertheless self-contained and can be implemented independently.

The guidelines for *Home-School Partnerships* are intended for facilitators working with parents, caregivers and families on how to support learning at home. They are appropriate for parents and caregivers of children between the ages of 4 and 7 years. They promote informal learning and are applicable across languages and cultures. The guidelines do not aim to impose a set of ideals or an educational framework on communities, but rather seek to inspire parents and caregivers to support children in fulfilling their true learning potential.

The guidelines for Community-School Partnerships can be used to train a team of volunteers, community workers, library staff or teacher assistants to support young children as they learn to read and write. They are aimed at children from 6 to 7 years of age, in their first year of school, and will also benefit older children who are having difficulty learning to read and write. Some of the activities could also be used as part of the curriculum in the year

REPSSI is a regional organisation working across 13 countries in Southern and Eastern Africa. We exist to provide leadership, quality technical assistance and knowledge in psychosocial care and support for children in communities affected by HIV and AIDS, poverty and conflict. REPSSI advocates that services, programmes and policies designed to support vulnerable communities need to respond holistically to the needs and rights of children and communities.

You may be asking how these educational interventions are psychosocial interventions or why they belong in the REPSSI Psychosocial Wellbeing Series. The term psychosocial intervention has come to refer to any planned programme or activity that aims to improve the psychosocial wellbeing of people. Psychosocial interventions build upon a child's natural resilience and family and community support mechanisms, and attempt to provide additional experiences that will promote coping and positive development, despite the adversities experienced.

If psychosocial interventions stand alone, without links to family and community interactions, and to other programme areas, they have limited potential to effectively contribute to the psychosocial wellbeing of the individual and of the group. Many interventions that are not planned or conceived as psychosocial interventions can have significant psychosocial impact. Examples of such interventions are welfare grants and nutritional support. By removing significant stressors, such as hunger, general wellbeing, including psychosocial wellbeing is likely to improve. What is important is 'how' the nutritional support is offered and that psychosocial issues are not ignored.

Although these two sets of guidelines are educational in nature, by working to prevent school failure, we will be removing one of the factors that could impact negatively on children's psychosocial wellbeing. Our experience has shown that both programmes also have direct psychosocial benefits. The Home-School Partnership Programme helps to develop a sense

before formal schooling. The teaching materials are in English and are appropriate for children learning to read and write in English as a second language.

Both guidebooks are appropriate for any community with high poverty levels, low levels of parental education and under-resourced schools with large classes. The programmes promote inclusive and child-centred education and encourage both children and adults to become life-long learners.

The guidelines were not written specifically for teachers. However, it is our experience that teachers have found them to be useful. The programmes are essentially 'preventative' programmes and are not necessarily for children who are struggling. They simply aim to give children what they need to 'close the literacy gap'.

'Middle class children clearly enter school with an advantage. Teacher training is often based on these middle class experiences of reading levels and teachers base their teaching on these phases – assuming that all children have access to early literacy interventions. When learners don't make progress it is assumed that natural ability is lacking and that they require 'remedial' support. Primary school (often) fails to give many learners what they need to close the literacy gap. This, coupled with the relentless pace of the curriculum, ensures that they will not succeed with the demands of secondary schooling, and that they don't expect to. Many learners experience secondary schooling, not as an entry to adult life, but a waste of time. (Rose, 2003)



Shelley O'Carroll
Wordworks Executive Director

of hope and build the self-esteem of women living in situations of extreme poverty by focusing on small, manageable tasks which will impact positively on children's learning. In the Community-School Partnership Programme, positive relationships with caring tutors have an impact on children's self-worth and confidence. A greater sense of mastery in daily school activities contributes to psychosocial wellbeing.

In line with the other guidelines in the psychosocial wellbeing series, these resources are primarily preventative and not necessarily aimed at 'at-risk' groups. The programmes will benefit all children who are affected by poverty.



Noreen Masiwa Huni
REPSSI Executive Director

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Primary Schools: Hyde Park, Montegu's Gift, Parkwood, Plantation, Acacia, Sentinel, Thomas Willschutt, Cecil Road, Capricorn, St James, AZ Berman, Cornflower, Highlands, Hyacinth, Kwafaku, Lantana, Merrydale, Parkhurst, Meadowridge, Mitchell's Plain, Samora Machel, Sikelela Imizamo, Springdale, Vukani, Weltevreden Valley Core

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Introduction to the programme

As parents and caregivers, we know that we are the child's first teachers. However, we often feel we do not know enough about our children, their needs and how they learn. The purpose of this publication is to give facilitators, be they teachers, parents, librarians or other community leaders, tools and some guidelines to support parents and caregivers in their task as the child's first teacher. The focus is early language and literacy, how young children learn and how we can support them at home. We also have sessions on maths concepts and fine and gross motor development. At home learning is informal whereas at school it is more formal.

You will notice that there is very little “professional jargon” in the programme. It is presented in easily accessible, straight-forward language. You will also notice that little theory “bites” are offered in the form of ***Did you know?*** boxes. In session 4, the handout on ***Tips from good readers*** is a very practical summary of the different theoretical perspectives on how children become good readers.

Although the Home-School Partnership programme targets parents as a way of reaching young children, it also has a significant impact on parental self-esteem and level of skill development. We have experiences of parents becoming more involved in their children's schooling, with some going on to be employed by schools as teacher assistants. One of the goals of the programme is to build a sense of community among parents and to create a positive, nurturing space for women to share ideas and ask questions. We also aim to develop a sense of hope and build the self-esteem of families by focusing on small, manageable tasks which will impact positively on children's learning.



Facilitator working with a group of young mothers at Masiphumelele Library.

Key messages in this manual

- Parents/Caregivers are the principal teachers of their children and must be supported in that role.
- It is the responsibility of the school to initiate and build positive relationships through fostering mutual understanding, building trust and sharing information.
- The positive impact of a partnership approach on children's learning and general well being is, in most cases, enormous.
- Many children grow up in bilingual homes. At school, many children learn in a language which is not their home language. This can be very challenging for children. It is vital that children feel good about their home language and where possible learn to read and write, at least for the first three years, in their home language.
- Learning at home is informal –the world is your classroom.
- We aim to link the home-school partnership programme with the daily lives and support structures of the children in their community. As mentioned in the preface, the programme does not aim to impose a set of ideals or an educational framework on parents and communities, but rather to inspire parents to support the children in their care to fulfil their true learning potential. Where possible we try to use examples from parents'/children's every-day context to illustrate different points.

Who is the guide for?

This guide is for facilitators to run a training programme for parents and caregivers of young children.

- It's good if the facilitator has some background knowledge on how children learn to read and write
 - If facilitators do not have background knowledge in early reading and writing, initial training would be advisable
- See contact details on the right

Contact details:

comrie@imagine.co.za

www.wordworks.org.za

Tel: 021 788 9233

Who is this programme for?

The programme is intended for parents/caregivers/grandparents of learners between the ages of 4 and 7 years, from schools in disadvantaged communities and is **not** necessarily for parents of learners who are struggling. It is essentially a “preventative” programme. It is our experience that the course often attracts caregivers who are natural leaders. If possible, each course should include three or four teachers, crèche leaders or ECD workers from the community who will be able to sustain the programme.



Parents and care-givers from Capricorn Primary School and Meadowridge Primary School, W. Cape, South Africa

Suggested course outline:

Session 1 – Getting to know each other and the programme; feeling good about yourself and your child; building on learning events at home – parents/caregivers are the child's first teachers; talking about how children learn; the importance of good self-esteem.

Session 2 – Language learning; talking about how children learn language and the importance of home language development; why it's important to tell and read stories with children and how this helps with learning to read at school.

Session 3 – The importance of drawing and experimental writing; the role of writing in learning to read, and how children become writers by reading and readers by writing.

Session 4 – Listening and listening games that support reading and writing; using print around you; tips from good readers.

Session 5 – Games to play to develop big and small muscles, balance and good body image; how these aspects affect reading and writing; the importance of good hearing.

Session 6 – Games to play to develop some basic maths concepts.

Session 7 – Review of the material covered; handing out of booklets; further discussion about changing routines and positive discipline; celebration and certificates; setting up your own support group.

Planning your programme:

- **Time:** The programme is divided into seven sessions. The suggested time for each session is 2½ hours with short breaks in between activities. However, you can design the programme to suit the needs of your community. If you know beforehand that members of your group have some experience in supporting literacy and are readers, then it would be better to have eight sessions. Session 3 and session 4 have optional activities which could take a whole session. It's good to negotiate and plan with some of the key role players but keep in mind that you might not be able to please everybody.
- **Optional activities:** There are a number of optional activities, and once you have a sense of the needs of the group, you can decide whether to include these activities. .
- **Planning your activities:** This is not a “chalk and talk” programme where you, the facilitator are the “expert”. There is lots of group work, participation and learning from each other. At the same time you need to keep the programme on track!
- **Deciding who should facilitate the programme:** This should be somebody who is positive, non judgemental, organised and can have fun too. This could be a foundation phase teacher, learning-support teacher, social worker, education official or an informed librarian or parent. If possible, the facilitators should have experience in how to facilitate a group – the programme involves lots of discussion and group participation rather than lecture-style presentation.
- **Number of facilitators per group:** We suggest you work in pairs and take turns to present different sections and organise handouts.
- **Number of participants per group:** The ideal number is twenty-five to thirty participants.
- **Why seven sessions:** Learning support programmes generally suggest consistent input over a period of time where tasks learnt can be practised and consolidated. Parents accumulate knowledge and insight over

the seven weeks and although it is often quite an intense experience, the impact is more positive than offering the course over several months. It takes at least six weeks to change our habits and we need to work on the changes consistently to make them happen! Much of the success of the programme depends on parents managing to change their attitudes and routines to include more activities related to education. Another reason for seven consecutive weeks is that generally a positive sense of community develops among the group during this period after which participants might continue either working at the school or meeting as a group. Another option would be to make the sessions shorter and work on six consecutive sessions followed by a break and then another four sessions.

- **Be super organized!** When you have all your handouts and resources ready and available you can be relaxed and flexible. Each group is different – sometimes you will find that you were not able to cover certain material you had planned to cover or perhaps you had to go over material from the previous session. Be sensitive to the needs of the group – notice when you are giving too much information or too little. Also notice who is doing most of the talking!
- There is a planning outline in the appendix based on the information in the guide. This will help you plan each session.
- **For suggestions on how to encourage participation see Appendix I.**

Specific training methods used in the programme:

- Practical activities where participants continuously DO the activities you are discussing/presenting
- Group discussions
- Question and answer sessions, not allowing one or two people to dominate
- Reporting and feedback on tasks, including those practiced at home
- Consolidating and summing up after each activity, plus linking the previous session with the present activity
- Clarifying the educational purpose of different activities so that parents see the relevance to the **big picture** and their goals and hopes for their children
- Presentation of certain material by facilitators
- A non-judgmental attitude based on inclusive and child-centered education
- Scaffolding learning – working from the group's understanding and experience (see the glossary for more on scaffolding)
- Integrate local knowledge and traditional games with learning
- Personal question time – Some participants may have burning questions they wish to ask but may be too shy or may feel their question is too personal. Explain to the group that you will be available for questions during the snack break. (See Appendix 3 for examples of questions asked by parents).

Resources included in the programme:

- Photo-copiable **Little books** and **Picture sequence story** (Some available in English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa)
- Short booklet: **My body and space around me**, developed in conjunction with an occupational therapist
- A handbook containing a summary of the programme, **Supporting learning at home**, for parents to take home at the end of the parent programme (available in English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa)
- Charts and handouts including games
- Lists of books and resources for further reading

The structure of the Facilitators Guide:

The guide consists of: seven sessions; an appendix; a resource pack with handouts and charts to be used during the programme; a glossary; a bibliography including recommended books

Time for each session:

Generally we suggest 2 ½ hours once a week for seven weeks. However, depending on the group and how many optional activities you include, you may need eight sessions OR seven three-hour sessions with a break half way through the session.

All sessions will have:

Focus of the session - a short introduction

Purpose - a more detailed list of the aims for the facilitator

Suggested materials for the session - A list of suggested materials including materials for each participant. It will



be important to check these in advance to help you with the budget for the programme.

Getting started - Suggestions on how to get started

Facilitator talks/reads - Time for the facilitator to present new information

Share with your partner/group/the whole group - opportunity for group work

Sum up - a chance for the facilitator to sum up after activities

Homework tasks - a selection of tasks for the group to try out at home – based on the session

Most sessions have:

Did you know? - “Bite sized” sections containing theoretical information to back up or inform the section you’re dealing with - you decide how much information to give to your group.

Helpful hint - Suggestions or cautions on how to manage certain sections

Optional activities - you will have to get to know your group and then decide whether to include these activities during the session, at a later stage or not at all. Session 3, for example, has two fairly long optional activities – if you include these activities you will either need a longer session or an extra session.

Handouts and charts: These are available in the resource pack

Appendix: 1: Suggestions to encourage participation; 2: Planning outline; 3: Some examples of questions asked by parents and responses

Glossary and Bibliography: There is a glossary at the end and a bibliography with some recommended reading

Session 1



Expected time: 2 ½ hours
(including snack time and personal question period)

Focus of the session:

All about the programme; We/you the parents/caregivers are the children's first teachers

"It taught me to teach my child in a fun way; Working with my son now just brings out the best in him"

– quote from a parent on a previous course

Purpose and content:

- Getting to know each other and the programme
- Feeling good about yourself and your child
- Explaining and exploring "learning events" at home – what families are already doing and building on these positive practices
- Thinking and talking about childhood – exploring YES and NO parenting skills
- Talking about resilience (see the glossary for more information)
- Optional: Introducing the Circle of Courage
- Exploring how do children learn best
- Setting homework tasks



Suggested materials

for the session:

- ✓ Chart 1: "How young children learn best" (Resource pack)
- ✓ Register and name tags
- ✓ Handout with dates, times and different topics to be covered
- ✓ Newsprint and Koki pen, or board and chalk

Suggested materials for each participant:

- ✓ Small lined exercise book to be used as a journal
- ✓ Pen
- ✓ A4 plastic envelope or a strong brown envelope which participants decorate
- ✓ Handout 1: "Circle of Courage" (Resource pack)

Activity I

Getting started – Introductions and welcome:

- Introduce yourself and share a little of your background including whether you are a parent/grandparent
- Say one or two positive comments about being part of the programme.
- Give each participant a notebook/journal, envelope, pen and name tags.
- Explain that the notebook is a very personal journal – everyone should use the language of their choice and if they prefer, use drawings or diagrams to remind themselves of the points or ideas to remember.
- Present the focus of the session

Share with a partner:

Explain to the group that you are going to take a bit of time for everyone to get to know each other.

“Turn to the person sitting next to you, introduce each other and tell your partner what you hope to learn on the course. You have about 5 – 10 minutes.

Then each person will introduce his/her partner to the big group and mention one thing he/she would like to learn on the course.” Write all the expectations on newsprint/chalkboard as parents talk.



*Parents from Cornflower Primary school
chat together*

Summarise scope and goals of the course

- Mention that we all have hopes that our children will fulfil their potential and be their best. Being a parent isn't easy, and there are so many things we need to think about. On this course we can't cover everything. Our main focus will be how to support informal learning at home and in the community.
- Refer to the expectations written up on newsprint. Explain which topics you do hope to cover during the course and which you will not be able to cover.
- Suggest that should the group want more information on certain issues, then they could invite someone from another agency to introduce this topic.

Facilitator talks:

- Homework: Explain that there will be small homework tasks every week which are generally fun and informal
- Language issues: Discuss language preference and if necessary appoint someone to translate
- Housekeeping and basic ground rules: Point out that you would like everyone to feel SAFE – the group should always listen to each other and give each other time to speak and ask questions. Point out that you will be asking people questions randomly and if they are not ready to answer they can just ask to pass. Mention that you would like to give everyone a chance to speak rather than have a few people always answering. Remind the group that there will be NO FORMAL TEACHING BUT LEARNING THROUGH PLAY/ INFORMAL LEARNING. This is the group's time to share ideas, ask and answer questions and enjoy being together.
- Include other practical issues such as turning off mobile phones, directions to the toilet, and time for tea/break
- Refer to the hand-out of dates

Activity 2

Share in small groups:

Reflect to the group that they, the parents are their child's first teacher:
Ask them to think about what they teach their children and how they do it.
Then ask them to tell their small group about one thing they taught their child that week.

Share with the big group:

Give those who would like to share their ideas with the big group, time to do so. Always make sure one person doesn't dominate the discussion.

Sum up:

Sum up what parents mentioned they teach their children. (The following are examples of responses from parents: we give love, food, shelter, teach right from wrong; show respect; we teach language; we teach them to sing, dance, run, jump; dress themselves, wash, say prayers.)

Affirm these informal learning suggestions and present a few practical examples of “learning events” at home. Choose a few practical examples to demonstrate these important “learning events” such as learning to recognising their own name; counting out 5 potatoes if there are 5 people to cook for; cutting something such as an apple in half. Ask the group easy questions along the way such as: “Why are these important? What do children learn?”

Activity 3

Facilitator talks: How do young children learn best?

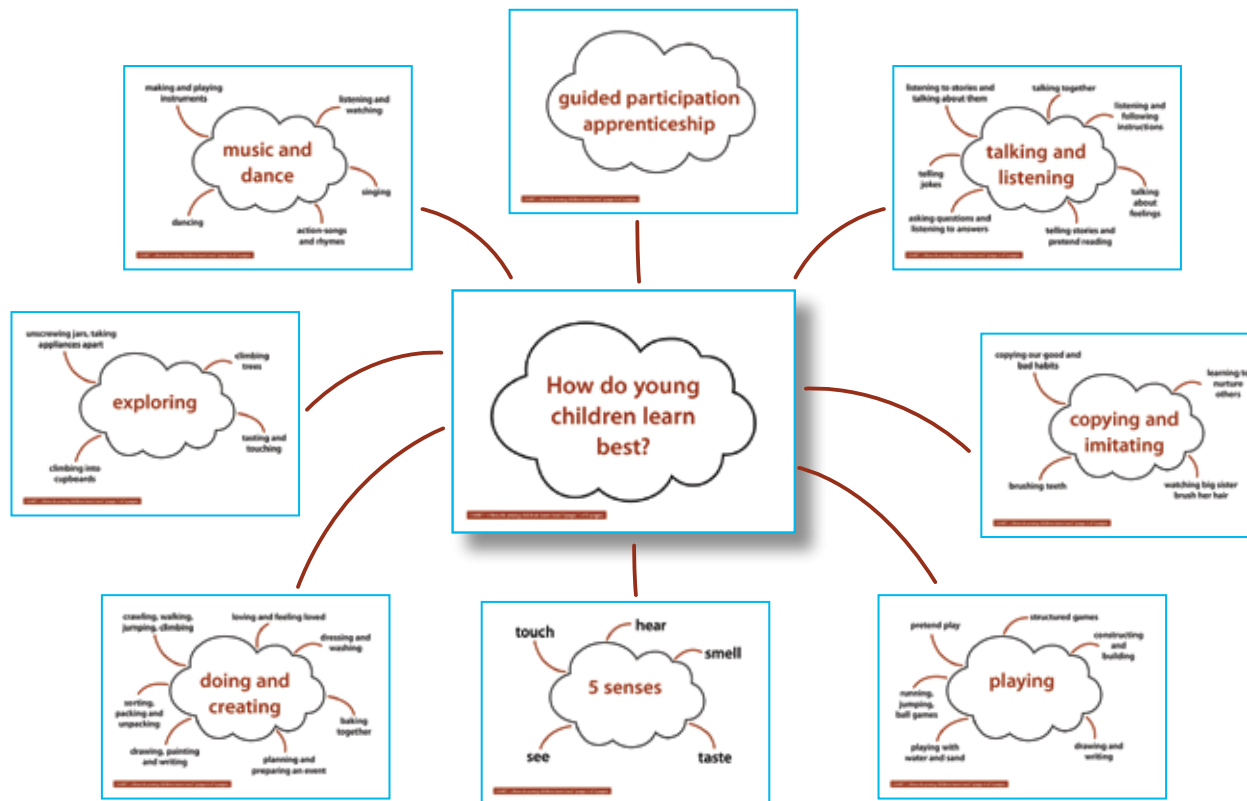
This is an informal discussion with the whole group. Use Chart 1 and place all 8 A4 pages around the heading – **How Children Learn Best** -like a mind-map. Use the table in the resource pack, **How children learn best**, to guide your discussion, or as a handout for parents to take home. Ask easy questions such as: “What do you think this means?” or “Can anybody give me some examples or suggestions?”

This may be your opportunity to talk about **scaffolding** children’s learning. Simply put, this is when we try to understand our children’s level of knowledge and understanding, and we support/guide them to the next level. Parents often do this naturally. (There is an explanation on scaffolding in the glossary.)

Interacting means sometimes we listen to our children and sometimes they listen to us - we take turns. This kind of learning and teaching requires us to ask the right sort of questions but NOT in a judging or “policing”

sort of way. Encourage parents to use open-ended questions and problem-solving questions, such as: “What do you think will happen if we do ..?” or “Have you seen something like this before? Where?” Remind parents that learning something new can be difficult and if we laugh at our children or embarrass them, they may not feel brave enough to try again.

You will also need to draw attention to the different types of play and explain how important learning happens through play.



Helpful hint:

To help you with this discussion use the table in the resource pack, *How Children Learn Best* and read the notes in the glossary on the terms *scaffolding*. Encourage participants to give examples from their lives, and adapt your examples to suit the experiences of your group.

Did you know?

Families all over the world use guided participation in a very natural way. In adult or formal work situations we usually call this form of training **apprenticeship**. These are some examples from different families around the world. (Please refer to the table in the resource pack for more examples.)



Sum up by saying:

There are lots of things you can do at home to support learning. Our job as parents is not to teach in a formal way but in a supportive, at times playful way (though of course sometimes you have to give very clear instructions, such as “Don’t touch the stove! It’s hot! You will burn yourself!”) In this course, we want to find out what you are doing and help you to do more, so that we can all help our children to be their best and true selves.

Take a 15 minute break

Optional activity

Facilitator talks: Reflecting on positive and negative parenting strategies

“When we were children our parents or caregivers looked after us. They had certain rules and ways of treating us – let’s call these **parenting strategies** or ways of being a parent. Now you will have a chance to think about these **parenting strategies** and decide for yourself which of these strategies YOU want to continue using with your children, and which you do not want to use, because you don’t think they are good or the right strategies to use with children today.” (You may want to give some of the examples listed on the chart on page 20.)

Helpful hint:

Leave the chart up during the session and encourage participants to look at the chart again and make their own notes or sketches. Remind them to use the language of their choice and to ask if there are any words that are not clear. You may need to keep a bilingual dictionary at hand.

Some Examples from Parents

Yes

- * I lived with my aunt and uncle and they made sure I went to school
- * We sang a lot at home
- * Although life was very hard, I had to fetch water from the river, we learnt self-discipline
- * We used to pray a lot as a family

No

- x We had too much work to do and had no time to play – I had to get up at 4:00am and work in the garden before school and then after school
- x I was afraid of my parents
- x We could not talk about our feelings

“Some of us have had very painful experiences as a child, and you do NOT have to talk about these at all. Think about positive strategies used by your care-givers and talk about these. Think about what you learnt from your parents and family. How was it for you when you were young?”

Now Share with a partner:

“Talk with your partner about 1 or 2 things you think were positive that you want to continue doing, and 1 or 2 things that were negative and you do not want to do. REMEMBER YOU DO NOT HAVE TO TALK ABOUT ANYTHING THAT MAKES YOU SAD OR ANGRY. When you're ready we will have some feedback and those who would like to share their ideas with the group can do so.”

Sum up:

Reflect that we have all had different experiences, some more difficult than others. Despite the experiences which may have been stressful or even traumatic, most of us manage to get back on our feet again. The term we use for this ability is **resilience**. The word resilience may not be familiar to the group, if necessary translate this word or alternatively use different analogies to explain the meaning, such as: In Cape Town resilient trees are able to remain standing despite the strong South Easter wind. (See the glossary for more on **resilience**.)

Share with a partner:

“How do you think you can help your child and family as a whole to be more resilient?”

Optional activity:

Helping our children to be their best selves – working with The Circle of Courage. (See the glossary for more information.) This activity could take place at the end of the session as a concluding activity.

Share with your partner:

Look at the circle below, talk together and then answer the questions together. Before you start you may need to explain or translate the four key words. (Please read the more detailed description of the circle of courage in the glossary so you can explain it in your own words.)

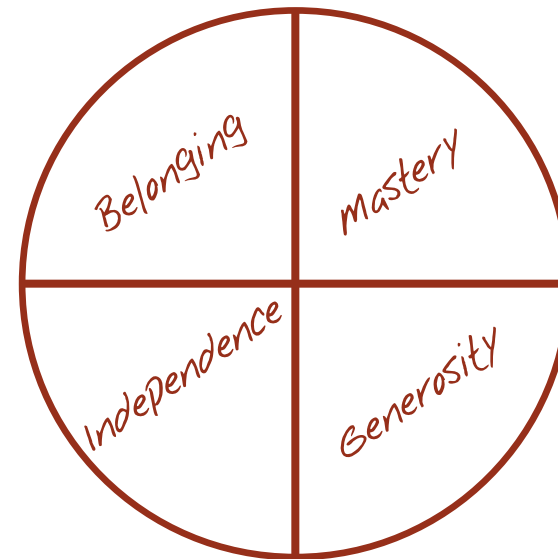
The Circle of Courage – helping our children to be their best selves

Belonging: Feeling a sense of community, loving others and being loved

Mastery: Gaining competence and learning skills in many different areas; Developing self control and a sense of responsibility; Striving to achieve personal goals rather than superiority

Independence: Learning to do things alone (For a young child, this may be just getting dressed alone. Later the child learns to make decisions and set goals and take responsibility for successes and failures.)

Generosity: Being able to give to others



1. How do we make our children feel a sense of belonging at home?
(For example: Making sure the child feels loved and valued; having regular routines so the child knows what to expect; having basic rules so the child feels safe.)
2. What else could we do to make sure they feel they really belong?
3. What small tasks or skills have our children already mastered?
4. What tasks or skills can we help them to learn so that they feel a sense of mastery and responsibility?
(We need to help our children master certain tasks and feel responsible but not give them tasks that are too difficult to master or require too much responsibility for their age.)
5. In what small way can we help our children to feel independent?
6. Do we feel generous and loving towards our children, family and community?
7. How can we build these four qualities at home?



Sum up:

After getting feedback from some of the groups clarify the four steps of the circle of courage. Also explain that this is a continual process throughout our lives.

Mention that over the next seven weeks the group will have the time and opportunity to think and talk about how they do things at home and in their community, and to see how they can best support our children's learning. This is also a time for the group to reflect on their own resilience and the resilience of their families.

Activity 4

Homework tasks:

Homework tasks will depend on how much and what you have been able to cover.

Some examples of tasks:

- Think about and notice what you are teaching your child and how you teach.
Give feedback in the next session.
- What routine do you have for your child?
- When are your “teaching and learning moments”?
- How much TV do your children watch and what do they watch?
- Do you read, and when? Does your child see you reading? (Encourage the group to make notes/pictures in their journal)
- Think about a time when good talking happened between you and your child. Where were you?
What were you doing? Why was it “good talking”? (For example: We didn't rush, we listened to each other and we said what we felt.) Give feedback about your good talking times next session.

Remind the group that you are available during breaks for more personal questions. If you are not able to answer questions say you will try to get more information for them. See the Appendix 3: ***Some examples of questions asked by parents and responses***



Session 2



Expected time: 2 ½ hours (including snack time and personal question period – you may want to decide with the group when is the best time to have your break)

Focus of the session:

Language learning and how young children learn best.

This parent programme was one of the first experience I had since I left school and it wakend me, I think I needed this very badly - Quote from a parent on a previous course

(If your group does not have access to many books and are reluctant readers, you may want to start off with the session on drawing and emergent writing – session 3 and then do this session.)

Purpose and content:

- Get feedback from parents on homework tasks, including some discussion on “good talking time”. This can lead into your discussion on language learning.
- Discuss why language development is so important for learning, and why it is important to develop home language as well as school language (particularly for children who are not learning in their home language at school)
- Think and talk about how children learn language and how we can stimulate/enrich language - including what we are already doing



Suggested materials for the session:

- ✓ Handout 2: “Language: How young children learn”
- ✓ Optional Handout 3: “Language for thinking and learning”
- ✓ Handout 4: “How to read a story?”
- ✓ Handout 5: “What do our children learn from stories and books?”
- ✓ A variety of appropriate children’s books to show parents what’s available. (If possible work closely with the local librarian when making choices.)
- ✓ One or two story books you would like to use to demonstrate interactive story reading
- ✓ Optional Handout 6: “Baby Bird looks for his mother” + sequence stories

- Discuss reading to and with children and introduce interactive story-telling and reading.
Discuss the importance of reading for ourselves.
- Give information on joining the library (optional)
- Set homework tasks

Choose a good story with lots of pictures, appropriate to your parents' context OR think of a good story you can tell. This may be a traditional folk tale or a more modern story and should take about 5 minutes to tell.

Activity I

Getting started:

- Welcome and housekeeping
- Sharing in your groups – feedback on homework tasks (all tasks except “good talking time”, this will be discussed later) Give everyone about 5 or 10 minutes to talk in their group about the homework tasks and what they noticed about their own parenting during the week.
- Present the focus of the session

Helpful hint:

This is the session when parents may suddenly discover they have a lot of positive and negative parenting habits. You will need to listen carefully and encourage positive interactions. There are a number of recommended books in the bibliography. Again emphasise **NO FORMAL TEACHING BUT LEARNING THROUGH PLAY/ INFORMAL LEARNING**

Sum up:

When you sum up after this discussion remind the group not to make huge changes all at once but to make changes slowly, one step at a time. They should not feel disheartened, for it takes a while to change habits and routine. Also remind the group that the main focus of this programme is supporting learning at home rather than focusing on managing children's behaviour and self-esteem even, though they are linked and of course very important. Although you will touch on positive parenting strategies, this is not the main focus. (See the glossary for more on self-esteem)

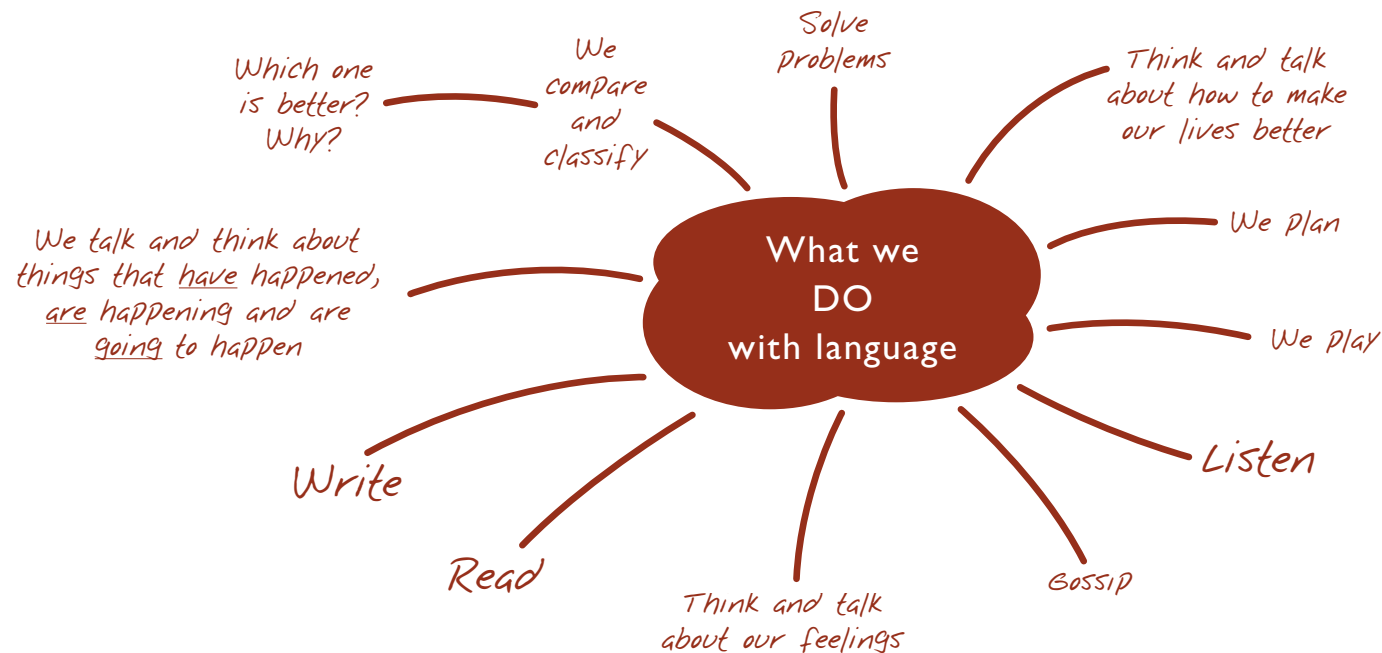
Activity 2

Share with a partner and the whole group: Thinking and talking about language.
Start by asking if anyone noticed "good talking time" over the past week.
This can lead into your discussion on language.



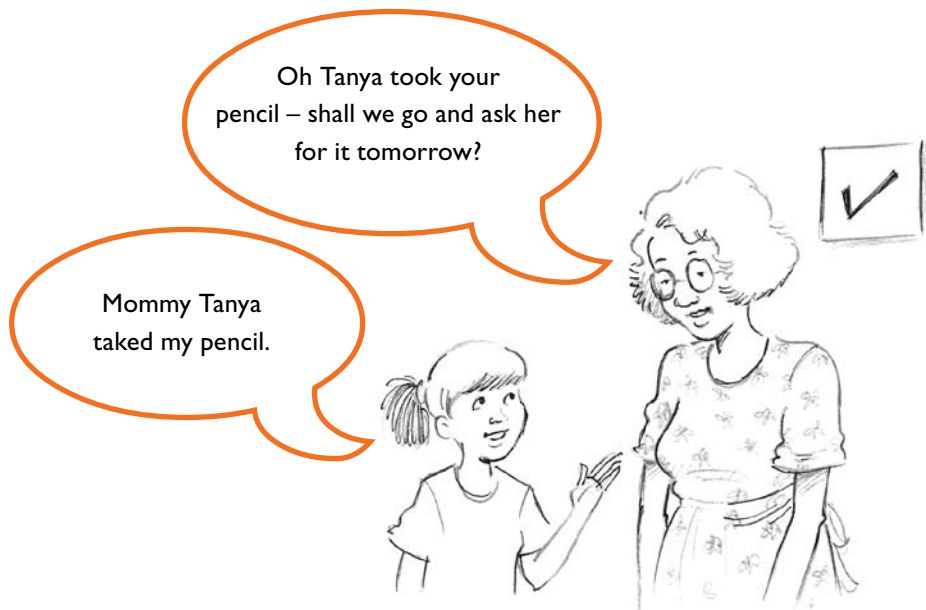
Talk with a partner:

- “What do we DO with language? Chat with a partner first, and then we’ll talk about it together in the big group.”
To sum up the feedback to the big group, using the mind-map below as a guide, draw a similar mind-map on newsprint or on a board – including some of the group’s responses.
- “Which language or languages do you speak at home and with your children?” (Explain the meaning of home language and use the term mother tongue if it’s more familiar to the group.)
- “Why do you think it is very important for children to feel good about their home language/mother tongue and be good at it?” Listen carefully when parents give feedback and if necessary clarify the general understanding on the importance of home language learning.



Sum up:

There are many uses of language and though some languages are more powerful, all languages are equal. Our body language is also important. Young children generally enjoy and manage learning more than one language. Many children grow up in bilingual homes. In the early school years it is best for children to learn in their home language. Strong home language is the foundation for children's second language. Children learn language at home and in their community, and learn by listening, talking and playing with others. Parents can encourage their children to talk and ask questions – show they are listening and interested in what the child says. Young children learn their second or additional language in much the same way they learn their home language. Making mistakes is part of language learning, so it is best not to correct children all the time. It is better just to model the more correct language. (Talk about the example below)

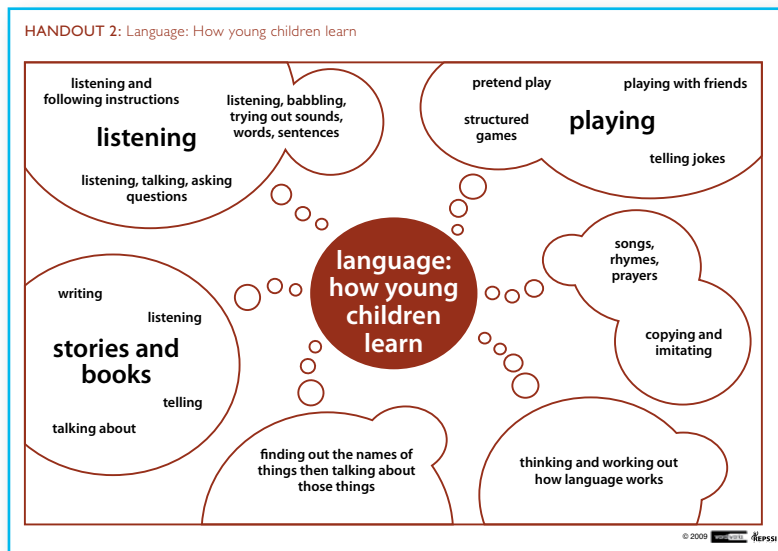


The course will give lots of ideas on how to help children at home to really develop their language. Most teachers would agree that language and communication skills are basic to success at school.

Activity 3

Group questions:

- “How did you or your child first learn language?”
- Use the two handouts: *Language: How young children learn best* and *Language for thinking and learning* to talk about all the different ways children learn and use language OR use the handouts as the basis for your discussion on learning language



Did you know?

Children between the ages of 2 and 5 years can learn between 2 and 4 new words every day according to Susan Carey from Harvard University. She says, given the opportunities, children at this age learn language so easily, they are linguistic geniuses! According to Maryanne Wolfe, a professor in early childhood development, “This intertwining of oral language, cognition and written language makes early childhood one of the richest times for language growth.”

Helpful hint:

The feedback discussion should be informal. However, you will need to listen carefully to make sure parents are on track. Use both handouts on language to inform the process.

Sometimes parents feel they must teach their children to “talk properly”. This is a good time to explain how we use language for different purposes. At home and with friends our language may be more informal, whereas at school it is more formal. The language in books is generally more formal – and different from the way we speak. Another good reason to tell and read lots of stories, is to help children get used to school language, at home. Parents sometimes confuse accent with correct language. We need to explain that we are more interested in children thinking and expressing themselves than in their accent.

Did you know?

The famous psychologist, Vygotsky, explained that language is much more than passing on of information – it is the tool through which we think, develop our cognition, and take part in the thinking of our society (from Pelman, C. 2009)]

*My language is my vehicle –
my racing car!
My language helps me
understand the world*



Language for thinking and learning.

Look at the picture and think and talk about what it means then read the suggestions below.

These are some ways to engage children in using language:

- Help them to know the names of different objects, concepts, feelings and ideas
- Talk about how things are the same and different – noticing and observing
- Predict: “I wonder what will happen? Why?”
- Talk through situations and problems and do planning, problem solving and reflecting together
“Have you seen something like this before? Where?”
- “Why do you think ...? What do you think?”
- “How shall we do it? Let’s plan together. Let’s first think – have we ever done this before?”
- Talk about the day – “What did you do? And then what did you do?”
- Encourage story telling – “Can you tell me the story? Who is the story about? Where did they live? What happened and why? And then what happened? And what happened in the end? What do you think of the story?”
- Children need to listen (input) but also be given lots of opportunities to talk (output) – talking **“pushes” learners to process language more deeply, and stretches their language: they recognise they have something to say and are encouraged to say it. (From Pelman, C. 2009)**
- Children need to feel confident as talkers. Parents, the family and teachers need to create an environment where children feel confident as talkers. This is especially important for shy children. Talking to adults and asking questions is one of the ways children learn.

Yes! Children need as many opportunities as possible to talk and receive feedback



Did you know?

Many parents think children learn language by copying imitating others. Although this is true to a certain extent, especially in some groups of people, it is not the main way children learn language. You will need to help parents understand that language is BEST learnt through interaction/ communicating with others in a number of different ways, especially in the early years. Until about 8 years, children learn a great deal of their language by communicating with more able adults or children at home and in their community.

Most educators would agree that language and communication skills are basic to success at school. However, it's important to be specific about what kind of language we are referring to, and how this language is used. Children learn to communicate naturally – we just have to watch them chat away to friends on the playground. But “playground language” is different from “classroom language” and many children struggle to bridge this gap. Parents can help children bridge this language gap by using some of the specific suggestions in this programme. Children should be given opportunities to engage in discussion as opposed to merely being exposed to rich language input. This enables language to “provide a framework for the child's thinking and experience...” (Bruner and Haste 1987 p 21). Children should be encouraged to ask questions such as “Why is it like this? How can I make it better?” By asking such questions, we know they are thinking, and thinking is the basis for good learning.

Sum up:

After getting feedback from the group, use both handouts on language (*Language: How young children learn best* and *Language for thinking and learning*) to give more information and sum up. Again encourage discussion by the whole group. Tell the group that one of the little secrets of success is good language skills. Emphasize that language forms the basis for early learning and is the foundation or the building blocks on which a lot of school learning happens. The early years are the best time to support and enrich language development and lay the foundations for learning.

Activity 4

Facilitator talks:

You can say: “As we discussed earlier, children don't begin learning language through formal teaching but in a playful sort of way and to communicate their needs. At home you may find a lot of what you communicate to your child has to do with every-day commands or questions, such as for example *Have you brushed your teeth?* *Please wash your hands!* This conversation is important but not very interesting or much fun for a child. One of the ways we can spend time with our children and really give all their language skills a BIG BOOST is by telling or reading stories together, in an interactive way. Now I'm going to read/tell a story and then we'll talk about it. While I'm reading, see if you can notice how I read the story, what sort of questions I ask, how I ask these questions, and whether you think reading/telling stories like this will help children?”

Activity 5

Facilitator reads or tells part/all of a story:

How to read a story so children will **WANT** to listen **and will learn more at the same time.**

- As far as possible, choose the story or book together – choose books that you think your children will relate to and understand.
- Introduce the book and talk about it. Look at the pictures and ask questions such as, “What do you think the story's about?”
- Read the title and help children relate it to their world. You could ask, “Have you seen anything like this before?”
- Make eye contact every now and then and sit comfortably together – this is good bonding time.
- Show you are interested and that story time is very special for you.

- Read with expression and change the tone of your voice – use actions too.
- Ask “checking and clarifying” questions to make sure the child is with you.
- Ask questions which encourage thinking and predicting. You may say, “I wonder why he did that? What would you have done? What do you think will happen next?”
- Listen carefully to children’s responses to your questions. You may say, “Oh, is that what you think? That’s a good idea. Now let’s see what happens in this story.”
- You may want to talk about the “moral” or “deeper meaning” of the story, by saying “Do you think we can learn anything from this story?” (Don’t become too moralistic or make too much of an issue about the moral of the story)
- Children often love to hear the same story two or three times.

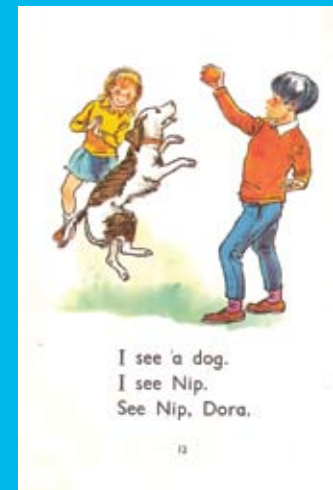
Questions for the whole group:

“What do you think? Did you enjoy the story? What do you think children could learn from lots of stories shared like this?” (If you think it’s appropriate, copy the points, *How to read a story so children will want to listen*, and give this to parents to take home.)



Helpful Hint:

You may need to explain the difference between a typical “basal school reader” and a child’s story book and why it’s not a good idea to read basal readers as story books. Basal readers are often quite boring as their purpose is to give young readers a chance to practise simple texts.



Optional - Share with your group:

If you have access to books, give each group a selection of appropriate children's books to look at and enjoy. Encourage interaction and discussion by asking questions such as: "Which of these stories/books do you think your child would enjoy? Why? Do you like the pictures in this book? Why?" Talk about which books are made-up stories (fiction), and which books are about real things or people (non-fiction). Include picture books with no text which give the child a chance to talk about the pictures and make up their own story.

If most people in the group are story tellers rather than readers, explain that many of the tips about reading stories apply to storytelling, with just a little adaptation. (For example, give the title of the story and talk about it.) However, you need to explain why it is important to expose children to books if possible. Some of the important pre-reading skills are listed in the memo. Talk through these ideas with the group, making sure you do it with real books.

Bookwise: Children need to interact with books from a young age.

They learn many things, such as:

- Books have a title on the cover and the writing goes from left to right.
- There are page numbers, and we read the lines from top to bottom (though some languages read from right to left, and bottom to top).
- The pictures relate to the text.
- We read the text and use the pictures as a guide.
- Books can be about real things (non-fiction) or can be not real, made-up stories.
- Books are fun and we can learn a lot from them.
- Books open up a whole new world for us.

Give me books, give me wings!

Activity 6

Group activity:

The purpose of this activity is to get participants thinking and talking about stories and how they help their children. Through this activity, they usually come to the conclusion that stories and books are very important for learning. The activity is set out for 5 groups but you can change this to suit your group's needs. You may want to work as a whole group or in pairs. Try to cover all the points.

(See Handout: *What do children learn from stories and books?*)

What do children learn from stories and books?

Group work: 1

Think and talk together about the 2 points in the box. Later you will get a chance to tell the other groups what you think.

- When we read or tell good stories, our children listen and concentrate for much longer than we expect them to – this is good because in school they need to be good listeners.
- When we talk together about the stories or what we see in books then children are encouraged to think. We may ask questions such as: “I wonder what would happen if ...? What do you think is going to happen? What would you do in this situation?”

Group work: 2

Think and talk together about the 2 points in the box. Later you will get a chance to tell the other groups what you think.

- Very young children look at the pictures in the books and tell their own story. This is good. Later they realise the words and pictures go together – the pictures help them to read the story.
- By looking at books and listening to stories, children become aware of print and that these funny squiggles mean something! Later, children notice more about letters and punctuation.

Group work: 3

Think and talk together about the 2 points in the box. Later you will get a chance to tell the other groups what you think.

- Children learn more about themselves, their feelings and the world around them from books and stories.
- Children learn new words AND more about language from books and stories.

Group work: 4

Think and talk together about the 2 points in the box. Later you will get a chance to tell the other groups what you think.

- Stories help develop the child's imagination. Do you think it's good for children to develop their imagination?
- Story language is different from the way we chat to our friends. By hearing stories, we learn and understand story language and this makes learning to read easier.

Group work: 5

Think and talk together about the ideas in the box. Later you will get a chance to tell the other groups what you think.

- When children learn to love and feel comfortable with books, they usually manage better at school.
- What does this mean: ***Give me books, give me wings!***



Sum up:

Get two or three people to share their suggestions on how to fit story time into their home routine. Remind the group that it's good to share stories regularly, preferably every day or four times a week. Explain that it's a bit like brushing your teeth – it's not much good doing it once a week! Remind them that interactive story telling or reading is one of the secrets of success.

Share with a partner:

Ask participants to reflect on the following with a partner: “What can I manage with story reading and telling? How will I do it? When can I best fit in story time into my home routine?”

Optional: Give information on how to join the local library – if possible invite the local librarian to address the parents.

Did you know?

All cultures have stories and we are all story tellers! Telling and reading stories is one of the ways we teach our children. Children as young as 2 years tell their “stories”. A writer called Carol Fox says “a story/narrative is the way we organise our experience along the dimension of time.” Another writer, Bruno Bettelheim, has this to say about children's folk or fairy tales “For a story to truly hold a child's attention, it must entertain him and arouse his curiosity. But to enrich his life, it must stimulate his imagination, help him to develop his intellect and clarify his emotions.” He goes on to say this about the effect of positive stories: “Our positive feelings give us strength to develop our rationality; only hope for the future can sustain us in the adversities we unavoidably encounter.”

Fox C, (1993) *At the very edge of the forest*. Page 68

Bettelheim B (1976) *The uses of Enchantment*. Page 5



Helpful hint:

Many parents are operating in “survival mode” and haven’t thought about their routine. If they want to add something such as story time to their routine, they will need to think about when in day they can best spend 15 minutes with their child/children telling or reading stories. They will also have to think about where to get stories and what kind of stories they want to tell/read. These are things you will need to discuss together, in a non-judgemental way.

Sum up:

Children learn many things from stories. Remind the group of some of the points relating to language learning, summarised in the handout: ***Language for thinking and learning***. Children are never too young or too old for stories. Children's first stories maybe just a simple retelling of events



Never too young to start

Optional activity:

Sequence story with picture cards: This activity can be used in Session 2, 3 or 4. It's an easy story to follow and parents can choose how they use the sequence pictures. (See the story: ***Baby bird finds his mother*** and 8 sequence pictures in the Resource pack.) Give each participant a set of pictures and tell/read the story to the group while they follow the pictures. They take the pictures home and retell the story to their children while the children follow the pictures. They can then cut the eight pictures into cards and let the child tell the story using the picture cards. These pictures can be glued onto cardboard to make a set of cards or can be made into a little book. Older children can write their own story using the pictures.



Helpful hint:

This story is usually a big favourite! You may need to explain to parents that when they or their children colour in the pictures, they should keep the colours consistent (e.g. the baby bird should always be the same colour.) In this way the story will make sense. Learning to tell stories in sequence is a very important part of reading and language learning. Encourage parents to make more stories using cut-out pictures or pictures that they or their children have drawn.

Activity 7

Homework tasks:

The tasks for this session will depend on whether parents have access to books and stories.

- Encourage the group to make notes/pictures in their journals and to think about the handout on how to read a story. Encourage them to think of their own stories, and tell or read stories to their children during the week.
- Include homework on the optional activities – if you have done these.
- Ask parents to notice their family's routine – What time do their young children go to bed? When do the children watch television and what do they watch? When do the parents have quiet time with their children
- Encourage parents to involve older brothers or sisters, or other family members in reading and telling stories, after explaining to them why stories are important and how to read/tell stories so that the younger children really benefit. This will also support the older child's reading and sense of responsibility.
- Encourage parents to give children quiet time in their routine when they can enjoy books on their own or with a brother or sister. For example, this may be after the story and before they go to sleep.



Parents from Cornflower enjoying books donated by Exclusive Books

“When you learn to read you will be born again ... and you will never be quite so alone again” Rumer Godden

Session 3



Expected time:
2 - 3 hours

There are two very important but optional activities in this session. If you are going to include them you will need more time. Either you can extend the session and have a good break, or have an extra session to cover the optional activities and any activity from the previous session you might not have covered.

Focus of the session:

Having fun with drawing and supporting early reading and writing.

Purpose and content:

- Get feedback from parents on homework tasks, and answer questions parents may have
- Have some fun with crayons and paper – draw your own pictures and talk about how you feel towards your pictures and your children's pictures
- Think and talk about the names of colours and how children learn about colours
- Think and talk about how drawing is important “brain work” for children
- Think and talk about how drawing and writing are linked
- Think and talk about how drawing, writing and reading are linked
- Think and talk about whether we can learn more about our children by noticing what is in their drawings
- Shared writing (optional)
- Introduce the **Have-a-go-writing** activity (optional)
- Homework tasks



Suggested materials for the session:

- ✓ Chart 2 – Mpendula's drawings;
- Chart 3 – Blessings drawings;
- Chart 4 – Drawing and Emergent Writing

Suggested materials for each participant:

- ✓ Blank paper for drawing, and if space allows, large sheets of newsprint fixed to the wall, so parents can make large pictures
- ✓ Crayons (these should be thick and non-toxic pre-school crayons – pack of 8 per parent)
- ✓ Blank scribbles for drawing
- ✓ Handout 8: “Shared writing”
- ✓ Handout 7: “Have-a-go-writing”

Activity 1

Getting started:

- Welcome and chat about the homework tasks. You can do this together as a big group or in pairs/small groups.
- Present the focus of the session

Activity 2

Group activity:

In this activity you give parents a chance to be children again and draw. Hand out one box of crayons to each parent and some blank paper. Explain that they have about 15 minutes to play with their colours and draw any picture they like.



Capricorn parents showing off their children's drawings

Helpful hint:

This is a chance for you to really get to know your group and to praise positive learning and noticing at home. Sometimes you may find that some of the parents have misunderstood your instructions and you need to correct the situation. It's very important that you don't criticise or embarrass anyone. You are building trust. We suggest you listen carefully and if necessary do your "teaching" when you sum up so it doesn't feel personal. Use sentences such as: "Do you remember we spoke about ... in the last session and "You told me how you are already doing ... , this is good." Always link the previous session with the new information and with the experience of the parents.

Share with a partner:

After 10 – 15 minutes of drawing, give everyone a chance to chat to their partner about their drawings. Remind everyone that there's no right or wrong way to make a picture.

Share with the group:

Allow participants to share some experiences with the whole group. Ask questions and make comments such as: "Did you feel OK sharing with your friend? If your friend criticised your drawing, how did you feel? This is how children feel – and if you criticise their drawings, they may feel embarrassed and may not want to draw again."

Helpful hint:

Some people may feel very self-conscious about drawing, so it's important that you create a space where they can feel relaxed and have fun. If you can and want to, you could play some quiet, cheerful music while they are drawing. Don't criticise or suggest changes to anyone's picture.

Activity 3

Facilitator talks:

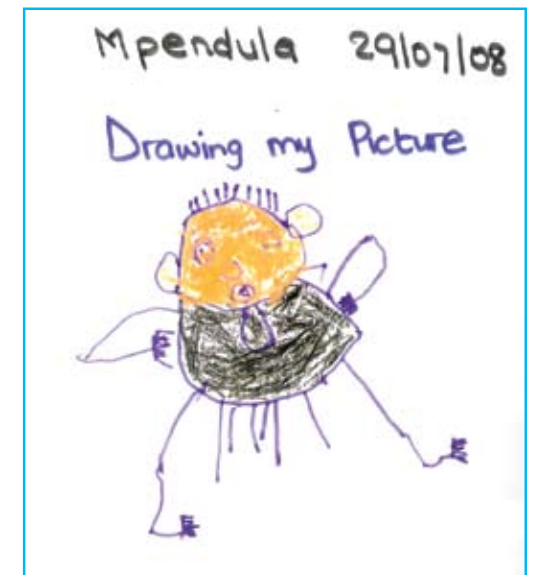
Using charts 2 and 3, explain how children's drawings are all different and that drawing is an important skill that develops over time. Some children are naturally gifted and some are not. Our task is to help children do important "brain work" through drawing, and to encourage creativity.

Mpendula's drawing:

Mpendula was 5 years old when he made this picture (Chart 2, Picture 1). The teacher was a bit worried about him when she saw his drawing and she was able to give him some special attention. This is what she did: To start with, she watched him when he was drawing. This is what she noticed: he didn't concentrate for very long; he didn't really choose his colours carefully; sometimes he didn't really look at what he was doing – he wasn't interested. The teacher started encouraging him to choose different colours, she taught him the names of 4 or 5 different colours and she encouraged him to notice colours around the room. She helped him to know more about his own body, saying things like: "Show me your head – yes, your head is on top; show me your feet – yes, your feet are at the bottom; show me your arms – yes, your arms are at your sides." She encouraged him to take time with his drawings and she didn't criticise him. She always encouraged him to NOTICE more and helped him by asking simple questions such as: "Can you show me your eyes? How many eyes do we have?" Over a few months there were big changes in Mpendula's drawings and also in his behaviour – he was able to concentrate for longer and he was happier in pre-school. This is a picture he drew 5 months later. (Indicate Picture 2 on chart 2)



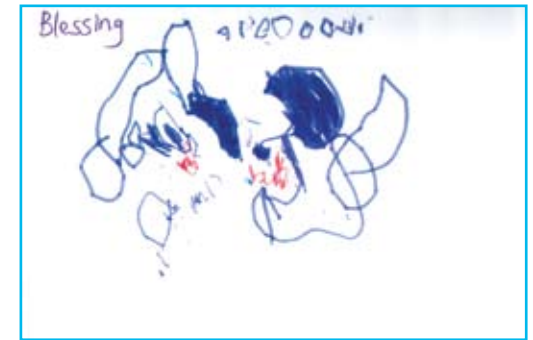
Picture 1



Picture 2

Blessing's drawing:

Blessing was in the same class as Mpendula, he was also 5 years old and the teacher was also a bit worried about him. Blessing tried hard to please the teacher but didn't seem to have an idea of how to plan his drawings as you can see in Picture 1 - a picture of himself. The teacher worked now and then with Blessing, giving him a lot of encouragement and talking with him in the same way she did with Mpendula. She encouraged Blessings to look carefully at things in the class: look at this orange. Can you see what shape it is? It is round. Can you see what colour it is? It is orange. Can you find something else that is round? Can you find something else that is orange? Look at this banana. Is it the same colour as the orange? Is it also round, or is it long? In this way the teacher showed Blessing how to look and notice things around him. This is his drawing 5 months later (picture 2). Like Mpendula, Blessing became more confident, his concentration improved – he too was more ready for learning. (Indicate Picture 2 on chart 3)



Picture 1



Picture 2

Emergent and experimental writing:

Using the charts 4 A, B and C explain how children gradually realize that drawing is different from writing. Explain to the group how in chart 4A, the child has drawn a picture and has included scribbles. These scribbles represent writing. The child has probably realised that drawing and writing are different. Perhaps she has seen somebody writing and is copying this behaviour. She realises that these scribbled marks mean something. In picture B the child has drawn a girl and is attempting to write words. There are a few recognisable letters such as a, w, e, z, o, l, g, b. In picture C the child is really experimenting with writing and making meaning – Perhaps this is a shopping list. “Can you guess what Vuyo is writing?” (Probable words: 1. carrot 2. apple 3. ? 4. cake 5. coke 6. chocolate 7. ?) “As you can see, the child is really taking BIG steps into the world of writing and needs lots of encouragement.”

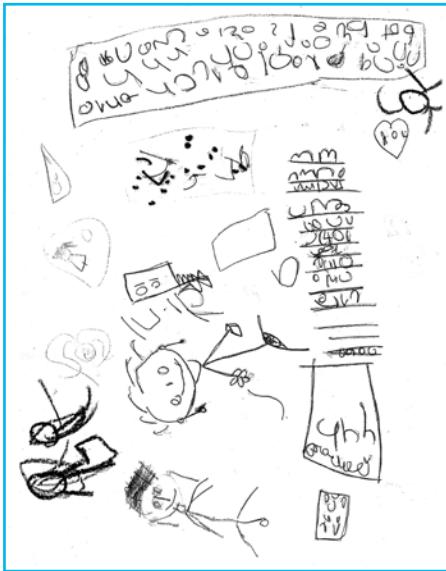


Chart 4A

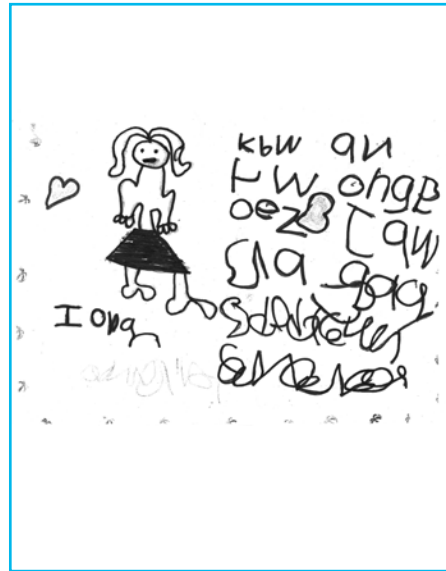


Chart 4B

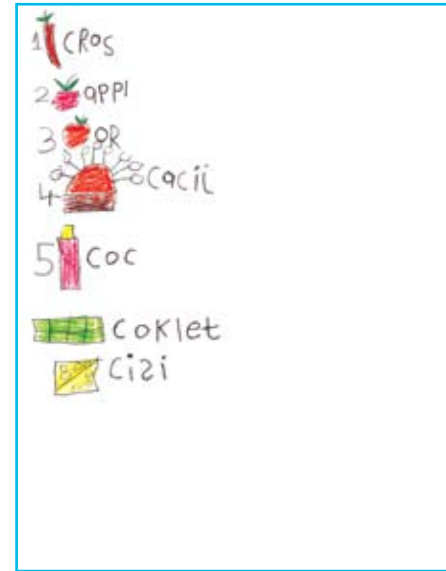


Chart 4C

Did you know?

Children do important “brain work” when they draw and think, and notice. Through drawing children make the big “jump” from noticing real or concrete objects (3 dimensional) to being able to represent these objects on paper (2-dimensional). Realising that real things can be represented by a drawing is a big step for a young child. After this they realise that real things can be represented by words on paper – writing. We should not tell children how to draw, but we can help them notice more around them – starting with their own bodies. We can teach them to notice where things are, and the shape and colour they are. We can talk about their drawings and give lots of encouragement. Helping children to notice more, is one of the ways we help them to learn.

Share with your group:

Talk together about drawing at home – why is it important and when will you do it?

Sum up:

Include all the following points, using the charts to support your points:

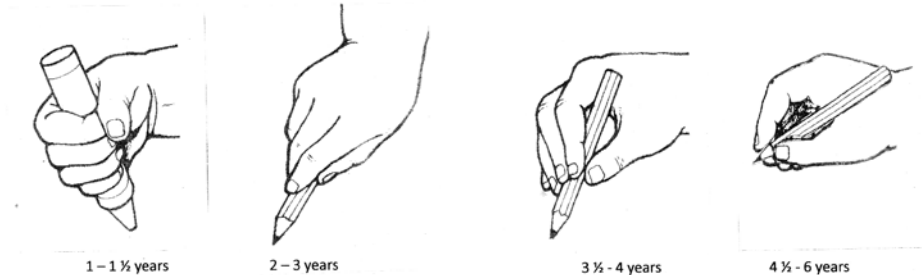
- In drawing children learn to put their thoughts on paper. They learn that what is in their heads can become a picture or a story. This is preparation for later when, they put their thoughts on paper in writing.
- They feel comfortable drawing and gain practise in using crayons and paper which is also good preparation for writing.
- They have an opportunity to be creative and use their imagination.
- Children become aware of the difference between drawing and writing (Chart 4)
- They develop the small muscles in their hands and they become more skilled at manipulating crayons which is all good preparation for writing. (If necessary, refer to Chart 5 or use this chart later in Session 5)

Helpful hint:

Don't be too quick to judge children's pictures. This is what a young father said about his 6-year-old's picture: "My little boy spent a long time colouring his page green. When I asked why he was just colouring the whole page green he answered, Ag Dad, can't you see the giraffe? It's hiding behind this green bush!" So ask children to tell you about their picture before you make assumptions about the picture.

How children learn to hold a pencil

Child holding a pencil:



Optional activity

Share with your group:

Have-a-go writing: Use the handout to work through this activity, participants work in groups. (Handout: Have-go-writing)

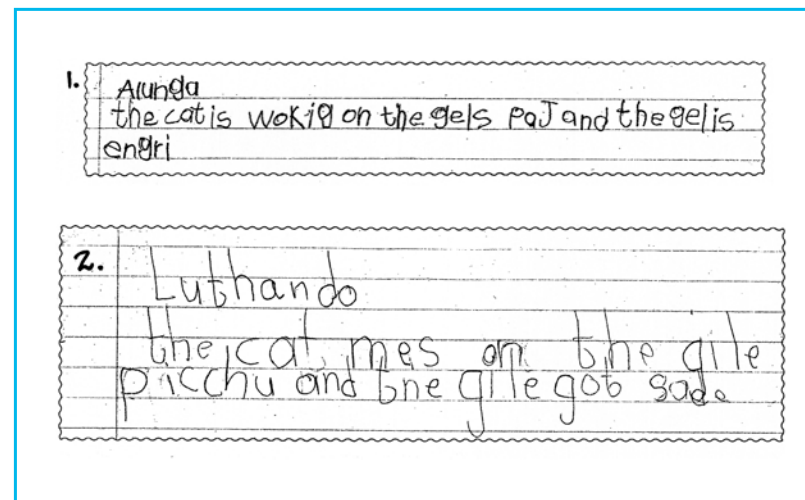
“Have-a-go” writing and “invented spelling”

Present the following to the group:

A teacher showed the children in her class a picture. The picture showed a little girl drawing, and a cat walking over her picture. The teacher talked about the picture with the children, and then asked the children to write a sentence about the picture. These are sentences from two of the children. Look carefully at the two children's writing, then answer the questions and talk together.

Can you read the writing? What is each child trying to say? Why do you think it is important for children to try and write even if their spelling is not perfect?

Now read on. You can see from the children's writing that they are trying to tell a story. Even though they cannot spell all the words they need, they have tried to spell the words. We call this invented spelling or “Have-a-go” writing – it makes sense if we sound it out, but the spelling is not correct. It shows that the children can use the knowledge they have about sounds/letters and writing, and slowly they will learn the correct spelling. The more we encourage children to write in this way, the more confident they become, and the more they write. Children become writers by writing.



Making sense of sentences:

1: The cat is walking on the girl's page and the girl is angry.

2: The cat messed on the girl's picture and the girl got sad.

Optional activity Shared writing task for Grade 1 (6 – 7 year-old) children

Shared writing is a way of writing together where the child writes what he can, independently, and the parent writes what is too difficult for the child. This sharing of the writing experience is fun and gives the child a sense of being a writer. We know that writing helps children with their reading.

What do children learn from shared writing and what is our purpose?

- By writing together, we show children that writing has a purpose and is a way of expressing our ideas.
- Writing together gives children confidence to give it a try.
- It helps children to use new phrases and new vocabulary and builds their confidence to express themselves.
- It helps children become aware that each spoken word matches a written word.
- It helps children to listen carefully for sounds in words and become confident about using invented spelling to write any word they can think of.
- It gives children a chance to write some of the words they already know so that the spelling of these words becomes automatic.

Group work: Doing shared writing

Give the following instruction to the group:

- Work with your partner and decide who will be the “parent” and who will be the “child”
- Now refer to Handout 8: ***How to do shared writing*** and continue

How to do Shared Writing:

1. Talk together first:

This may be about a special experience, or an outing or it could be about a story you've read or told to your child. If you're going to talk about a book, you may want to go back and look at some of the pictures. You may want to write a special message to someone or you could make a birthday card together. If your child is in the kitchen while you are cooking, you could write the recipe of the meal you are making.

2. Writing together:

Help your child to think of a sentence/sentences they want to write. For example: ***"I went to my granny and we had big samoosas"*** (10 words 10 taps on the table)

Show your child how to tap out the words in the sentence and then draw a line for each word. __ __ __
__ _____ __ __ _____ _____

Encourage your child to write as much as they can on their own

3. Support children's writing by:

Encouraging 'invented' spelling ('have-a-go' writing). If your child asks how to spell a word, you can say "Try and see if you can write it. What sound does it start with? What comes next?" Say each word slowly so that the sounds are easier to hear.

Helpful hint:

Focus on the message – what the child is trying to express –and NOT on whether the spelling is correct. Don't worry about correcting spelling at this stage. If you feel your child is not ready for a shared writing experience, wait a while and encourage drawing and speech bubbles to start with.

Asking questions, for example your child wants to write “I went to the shops.” You could say “ Oh that’s good and what did you buy”

Encouraging them to write beginning/end sounds. Then write words/ word parts for them if necessary

Asking your child to draw a picture to go with their writing (Sometimes draw first and then write)

4. Modelling good language:

In one of the previous sessions, we spoke about modelling good use of language. We can continue doing this with the shared writing. For example if your child says “I did go to the shop.” Then you can say, “that’s a good sentence to write, a better way to say it would be: I went to the shop.” Or just leave the sentence as it is and just focus on the message. Don’t focus on mistakes.



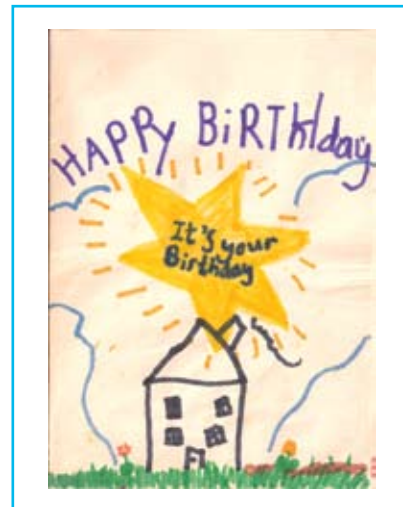
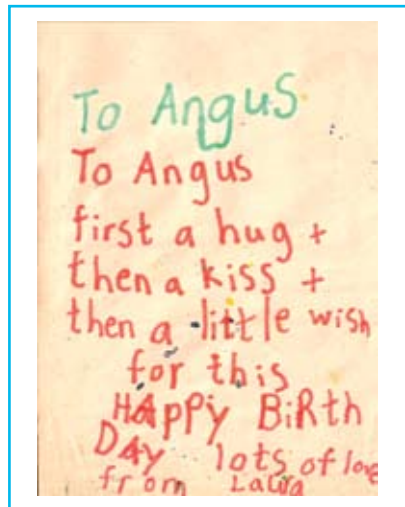
Activity 5

Share with your group:

Ask the group what they can do at home to make writing fun and for real purposes? Chat for 5 minutes then give feedback.

Sum up by saying:

Encourage your children to write as much as possible. Write messages to your children and expect a reply but **DON'T WORRY ABOUT THE SPELLING**. Add speech bubbles to your drawings; make cards such as birthday or thank you cards; write out recipes; write letters and post them. A three year-old's birthday card may look like a scribble on a page, but for the child this is important writing. Let children see you writing – letters, notes and shopping lists – so they notice that writing is useful and has a purpose.



Helpful hint:

If you don't have time to complete the optional activities during the session, please help parents to understand why it is so important for children to experiment with writing. Introduce the idea of "Have a go writing" or "invented spelling", and emphasize the importance of encouraging children to try, telling them that it's ok to make mistakes. They become better writers by writing. Writing also helps them to become better readers

Optional

Before the end of class give each participant a small piece of paper and ask them to write a message to their friend sitting next to them, or to you. Talk about how it feels to give and get written messages, and the difference between spoken and written messages.

Activity 6

Homework task:

- Each participant takes home a box of crayons, a scribbler and scrap paper if you have.
- Encourage parents to make time for their children to draw, and to notice, talk about and support their efforts. They should make sure children know at least five basic colours – starting with two, perhaps red and yellow, and using the crayons to help, – asking, “Please give me the red / yellow crayon.” Remind everyone of Blessing and Mpendula’s drawings, and how to encourage and ask questions, but not judge, compare or criticise. Also remind parents that the crayons will break because that’s what crayons do. They should teach children to care for the crayons but NOT to get too upset when the crayons do break.
- **Optional:** Encourage writing – even if it’s pretend writing and “invented spelling”. Parents could start writing little messages, and have fun with writing.
- Ask the group to think about language games they enjoyed playing as a child and what they think children could learn from these games. Ask them to share their ideas with the group the next session.



Bongani Mandlamakhulu and his daughter, Amahle, drawing together

Session 4



Expected time: 2 ½ hours
(including snack time and personal question period)

This is a flexible session - the facilitator will have to go at the pace of the group and either introduce all the activities suggested or just some of them. Some of the activities can be introduced in a follow up-session

Focus of the session:

More information about HOW we can support reading and writing

I felt literate as a person - Quote from a young parent on a previous course

Purpose and content:

- Get feedback from parents on homework tasks and answer their questions
- Talk about language games they used to play as children – as far as possible linking these with the material in the session
- Introduce the little fold up books and blank booklets
- Consolidate information on how to support reading and writing at home
- Introduce games to support reading and writing
- Tell about using print around us to support and develop reading and writing
- Talk and think about the fact that when we read and write our children will copy us



Suggested materials for the session:

- ✓ *Demonstration charts from Session 2 and 3*
- ✓ *4 pairs of scissors*
- ✓ *More blank A4 paper*
- ✓ *Examples of print around us – adverts, newspapers, empty cartons – typical of what your group of parents may have at home*

Suggested materials for each participant:

- ✓ *Blank booklets – 2 A4 pages stapled together*
- ✓ *Small alphabet charts, Handouts 9: (English, isiXhosa & Afrikaans)*
- ✓ *Optional Handout 10: "Games to play for better reading and writing – blending and segmenting"*
- ✓ *Optional Handout 11: "Reading with your whole brain"*
- ✓ *Handout 12: "Tips from good readers"*
- ✓ *Little books chosen from the resource pack – you may decide to give out two to start with, and then another one after each session. If you have a bilingual group try to translate the books into relevant languages – if possible these should be in the children's home language and in the school language; Include instructions on how to make the book and an example of a ready-folded and illustrated booklet.*

Activity 1

Getting started:

- Welcome the group and chat about the homework tasks – you can do this together as a big group or in pairs/small groups. Try to target parents who are really managing the programme, to give feedback. Talk about the library and story routine.
- Ask parents about the language games they used to play as children, and where appropriate, link them to language learning.
- Present the focus of the session.

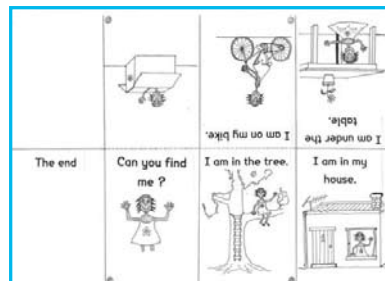
Activity 2

Little Books:

Hand out 2 of the Little Books and demonstrate how to make them (see instructions in the resource pack).

Encourage the group to chat about the booklets and to help each other.

When everyone has made one booklet, ask: “Why is it important to have little books AND what do children learn from these little books?”



Helpful hint:

By now some parents will have managed to change their routines to accommodate stories, games or drawing. Before you start chat to some of the parents who you have noticed are really managing the programme. Find out how they have changed their routine and then, during the feedback time, casually ask them to talk about their new routine. Always point out to the group that each person will have to develop their own system depending on their circumstances. Explain how sometimes parents form their own partnerships – for example, they share story reading/ telling and drawing time and all play games together.

Sum up

- Children love to own books and read them as often as they like – even younger children who haven't learnt to read formally.
- When children colour and draw their own books, they feel that books are part of their world at home – books are not only for school!
- The booklets encourage creativity and thinking – children need to think about what they should draw on the blank page so that their picture fits in with the theme of the book .
- Children learn a lot about how books and writing “work” in a non-threatening way.

Activity 3

Making your own little book:

Explain to parents that as well as making the little fold up book, they can make their own books with their child. These books can be illustrated by the child and can be on any topic, such as: My Family; Getting up in the morning; Foods I like the best; My Granny or an Alphabet book. They could be real or made-up story or based on a story children have listened to and loved. Encourage parents to use their home language in these books, and to give their book a title, author and page numbers.



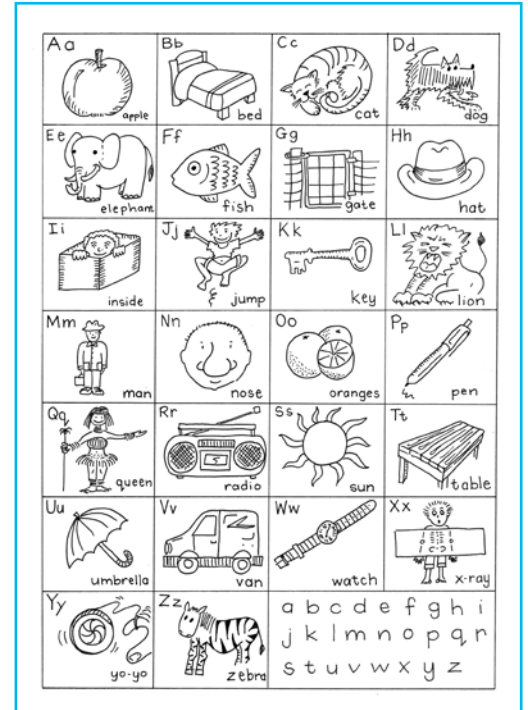
Activity 4

Alphabet Chart: Introduce and hand out the alphabet charts.

- Ask the group why it is useful to have an alphabet chart – what can children learn?
- Ask the group when we use the order of the alphabet. (For example when we look up a number in the phone book or find a book in the library)
- Some parents may feel worried that when they were at school they only learnt the “names” of the letters and now children learn the sounds of letters. Explain that both are important, and when we talk, we naturally use the sounds of letters so learning the sounds is nothing new and they should not be worried. Tell them we will talk more about sounds of letters in this session.

Sum up:

Children become familiar with the alphabet in a non-threatening way; the alphabet chart provides a reference point when children forget how a letter looks; they can use it when playing games such as “I spy” or other games parents may have introduced.



Games to play with your alphabet chart:

- Choose a letter/sound and see how many words you can think of starting with that letter/sound.
- Choose a letter/sound and a category (such as foods or girls' or boys' names) and see how many words you can think of that start with that letter/sound.
- Play "I spy": One person starts by choosing something in the room or in a picture and giving the first sound of that object, saying: "I spy with my little eye something beginning with" (If you prefer just say: "I'm thinking of something and it starts with") The other players have to guess the word. The clue is the first letter of the word. You must say the sound of the first letter of the word. You can also point out the letter on the alphabet chart.
- Choose a letter and then see how many examples of that letter you can find on one page of a newspaper, circling the letter.

When playing these games always start with easy tasks so children succeed from the beginning. When you play "I Spy" you can start with parts of the body (mouth, nose, finger toes) or with children's names. For example: "I spy with my little eye" somebody special and his name starts with /sss/ (Simpiwe). When you play, always praise the child for trying. If your child isn't ready to play this game, just leave it for a while.

Helpful hint:

Explain to parents that it's generally easier to start with a few consonants – as the vowels are more difficult to use in these games. We usually start with the following: [t, m, f, b,]. Explain to parents that in English, we use the "name" and "sound" of letters. For example, in English, think of the words *can* or *cool* we use the sound /c/ but in the words *circus* or *cigarette* we use the name c. If children ask how to make the sh or ch sound, parents can explain that in English, when two sounds stand together they often make a different sound: sh as in shoe, or ch as in church.

Activity 5

More games to play to support reading and writing

- Clapping words into parts or syllables. Starting with children's names, (eg. Za-ne-la, Si-mon) or words around the house (eg. po-ta-to says potato, te-le-phone says telephone.)
- Optional: Slow talk. Guess what I'm saying: " Please fetch my K- eys (Keys); Show me the d-og (dog), c-at (cat), f-ish (fish). Point to your n-ose (nose), m-outh (mouth), f-oot (foot)." Give children a chance to do slow talk – they ask and you guess.
- "Listen carefully. When you hear a word that starts with [m], then clap: dog, bird, lion, man, pig, horse, moo must ... Continue using different letter sounds, always starting with the ones that are easy to distinguish: m, f, s, b .. If children get confused, encourage them to watch your mouth for an added clue.

Activity 6

Noticing print around us

Tell the group the following:

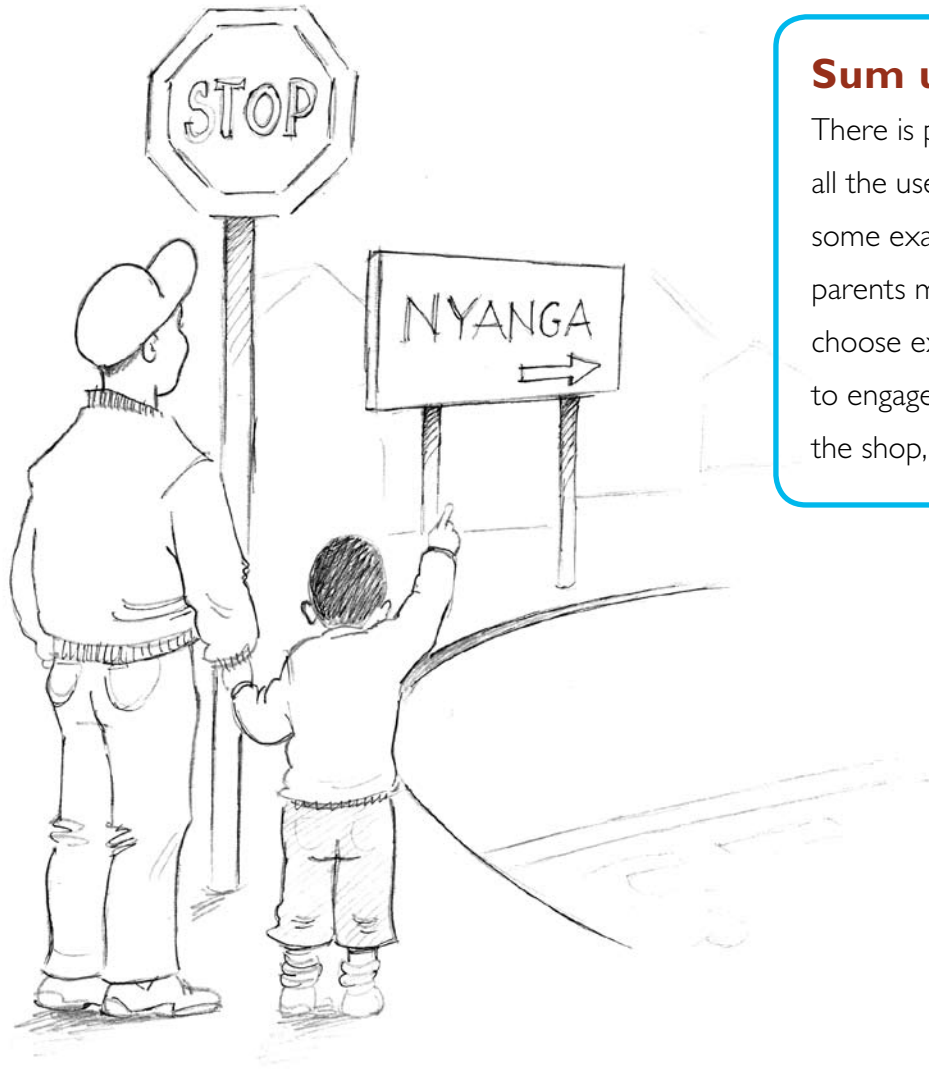
- Children love to read the print around them. You can point out different words to them. Examples are the road signs such as STOP; packaging on food boxes or tins such as MILK or FISH; names of shops or the garage; newspapers or leaflets. You could play games to remember what words say, and using leaflets and empty food boxes, make a pretend shop with your child.
- Read a shop or brand name and see if your child can find the words on the page you are looking at, or in the street you are walking along.
- Children like to try to write names of places, or their own shopping lists.

Helpful hint:

When you play games together, make sure having fun and developing skills is the main focus not winning. These games help children develop the very important phonological awareness skills of segmenting and blending and becoming aware of the first sound in a word, which are essential for reading and writing. Take time with them and allow the group to practise the games. In the resource pack, there is a handout on games to play for blending and segmenting. You can decide whether to give it out or not. It is possibly more useful for children learning in English

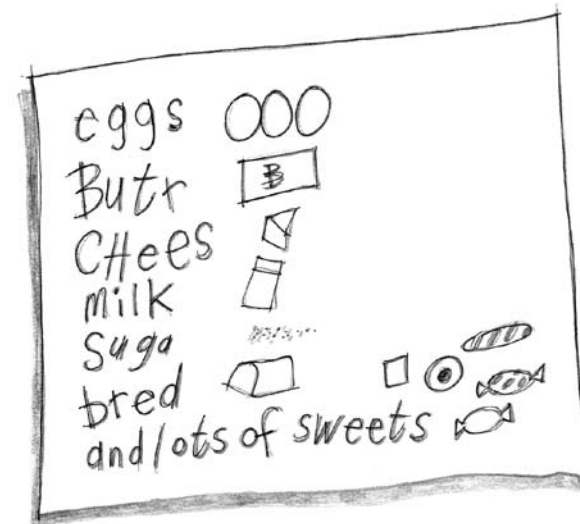
Ask the group:

Do you remember seeing any *PRINT* today in your home or on the way to school?



Sum up:

There is print around us that is useful and familiar – we can draw children's attention to all the useful print around us and help them make sense of it and guess what it says. Give some examples of print outside near to your teaching venue, as well as examples of print parents may find around the house, such as print on food packages, adverts, bank forms – choose examples appropriate to your group. Encourage parents to use every opportunity to engage with and make sense of the print around them with their children, in going to the shop, choosing items, writing shopping lists together or noticing traffic signs.



Optional activity

Reading with your whole brain:

(Use your discretion with this activity some people may find it difficult.) Explain to the group you are going to have some fun and see if they can make sense and read what looks like nonsense.

Reading with you whole brain:

Group work:

Read the passage and then chat about it.

Now talk together, using these questions to get you going:

- Can you read it? Does it make sense?
- All the words are spelt incorrectly so how could we read it?
- What do you do when you read?
- What do children do when they read?
- How can we use this knowledge to help children become better readers?
- Now look at the handout: ***Tips from good readers.***

(These are secrets from good readers!)

The trhee litlte pgis

Ocne uopn a tmie terhe wree trehe litlte pgis
who levid wtih tehir moothr in a litlte huose.

The olny iprmoetnt tihng is that the frist and
lsat ltteer is in the rghit pclae. The rset can be
a toatle mses and you can still raed it wouthit a
porbelm. This is baceuse we do not raed ervey
lteter by itself!

Activity 7

Sum up and talk together:

Explain to parents that there are many ways to support reading and writing, and the activities we have spoken about in the last 4 sessions, all help. Using the handout: *Tips from Good Readers*, help parents to pull all the threads together. Give each participant a copy of the handout: *Tips from Good Readers* and talk together, making sure each aspect is well understood. This discussion follows on from the previous one – *Reading with your whole brain*. Help parents to see the connections between the different strategies and **their** experience when reading *The Three Little Pigs*. You could use comments and questions such as:

- Do you remember how you read the first few words and then sort of guessed as you went along?
- What do you think good readers always do before they start reading? (They check the title of the book or the heading of the article, look at any pictures in the book, perhaps flip through the book, or look at the contents. This gives them an idea of what the book is about and prepares the brain for guessing or predicting words.)
- Do you think good readers ever skip difficult words? (Yes, and then they read the rest of the sentence and see if it makes sense. They may come back to the word and try to work it out or just continue.)
- Do you remember how you were able to read words such as frist or lsat? (You sort of guessed because the sentence made sense and you also noticed the first and last letter in the words.)
- As readers we use a number of different strategies. We need to encourage children to use these strategies from an early age.



Parents from Meadowridge and Cornflower Primary sharing the *Tips from Good Readers*.



Share with your partner:

What is one of the first things we do when we read stories with our children, or when they read to us?

Sum up:

Take feedback from three or four people then add - *One of the first things good readers DO before they read is to THINK about what they are going to read. They do this by looking at the cover, the title, the pictures and contents – if there are contents. In this way they are more prepared – words about the story may come into their head. This will make it easier for them to predict or guess. For example: If the book is about a zebra and you have checked the book first, it will be easy to guess the word **zebra** even if you have never seen the word before. It's good for children to know this from an early age.*

Activity 8

Homework tasks:

(These will depend on how much you were able to cover in this session.)

- See what useful print you notice on the way home with your child, or at home.
- Play one of the games from the session that you feel most comfortable with.
- Make a little book with your child or encourage an older child to make a book with the younger ones.
- Get to know your *Tips from Good Reader's* chart, and think about how you can introduce these ideas to the young readers in your care.
- Think about the games you used to play as a child. Which of these games are fun to play and will help in the physical development of your child? Share them with the group next week.

Session 5



Expected time: 2 ½ hours
(including snack time and personal question time)

Focus of the session:

Why it's important for children to develop their big and small muscles and their balance, and how this affects learning; how knowing and understanding words about the body helps with learning; the importance of good hearing for learning.

Purpose and content:

- Get feedback from parents on homework tasks, and answer their questions
- Talk about games they used to play and link these with the information in the session
- Help parents understand the link between physical development and reading and writing.
- Talk about how children learn by DOING and often through PLAY
- Work through the booklet, *My body and space around me* together
- Talk about how children learn to hold a pencil
- Recap information on the 5 senses and how children learn
- Talk about why good hearing is important and how it effects reading and writing
- Give homework tasks



Suggested materials for the session:

- ✓ Demonstration charts handouts from the previous session, for consolidation
- ✓ Everyday objects which could be used for fine motor development (eg. clothes pegs, clay or play dough, threading beads)
- ✓ Examples of things that could be used for games (eg. balls, home-made bat, rope for skipping)
- ✓ Chart 5: How children learn to hold a pencil

Suggested materials for each participant:

- ✓ Booklet: "My body and space around me"
- ✓ Handout 14: "Words and concepts, A"
- ✓ Handout 13: "Good hearing and learning" and "Milestones"

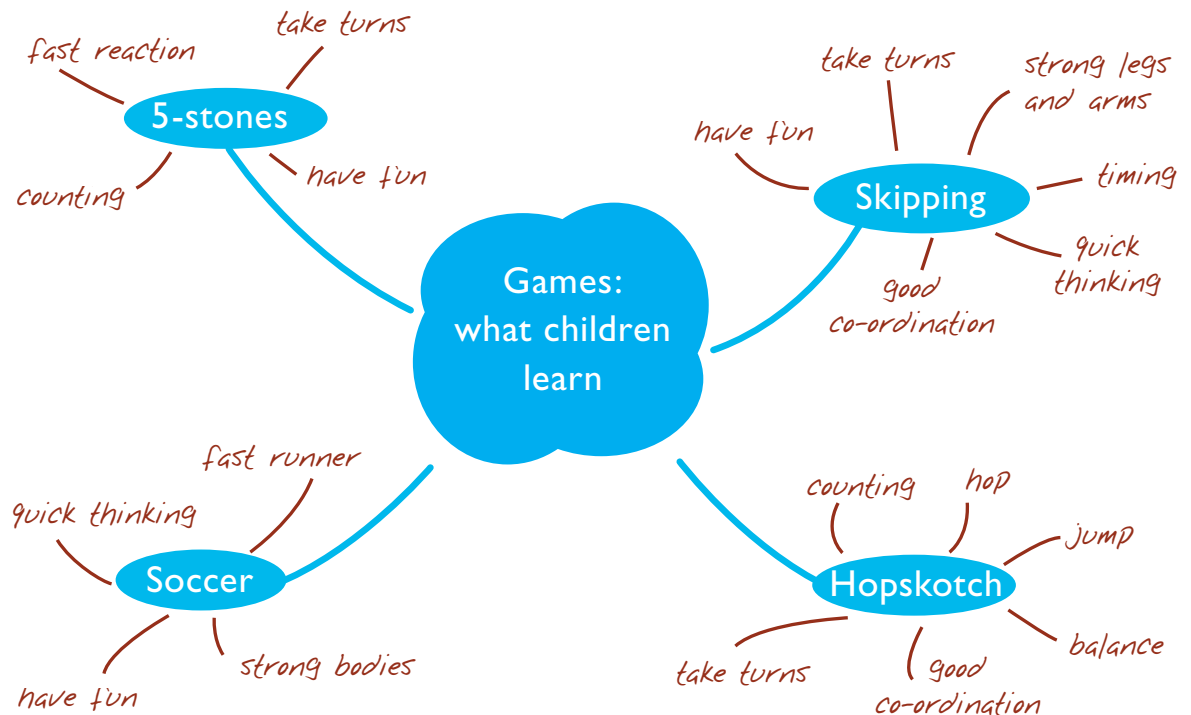
Activity I

Getting started:

- Welcome and chat about the homework tasks, you can do this together as a big group or in pairs / small groups.
- Present the focus of the session

Share with your partner and the whole group:

Get feedback for a few minutes about games the group played as children which teach children about their body and develop big and small muscles. Write up all the games on newsprint as a mind map (see the example on the right) and leave it up during the session. Encourage the group to demonstrate if necessary and to think about how children benefit from the games.



Sum up:

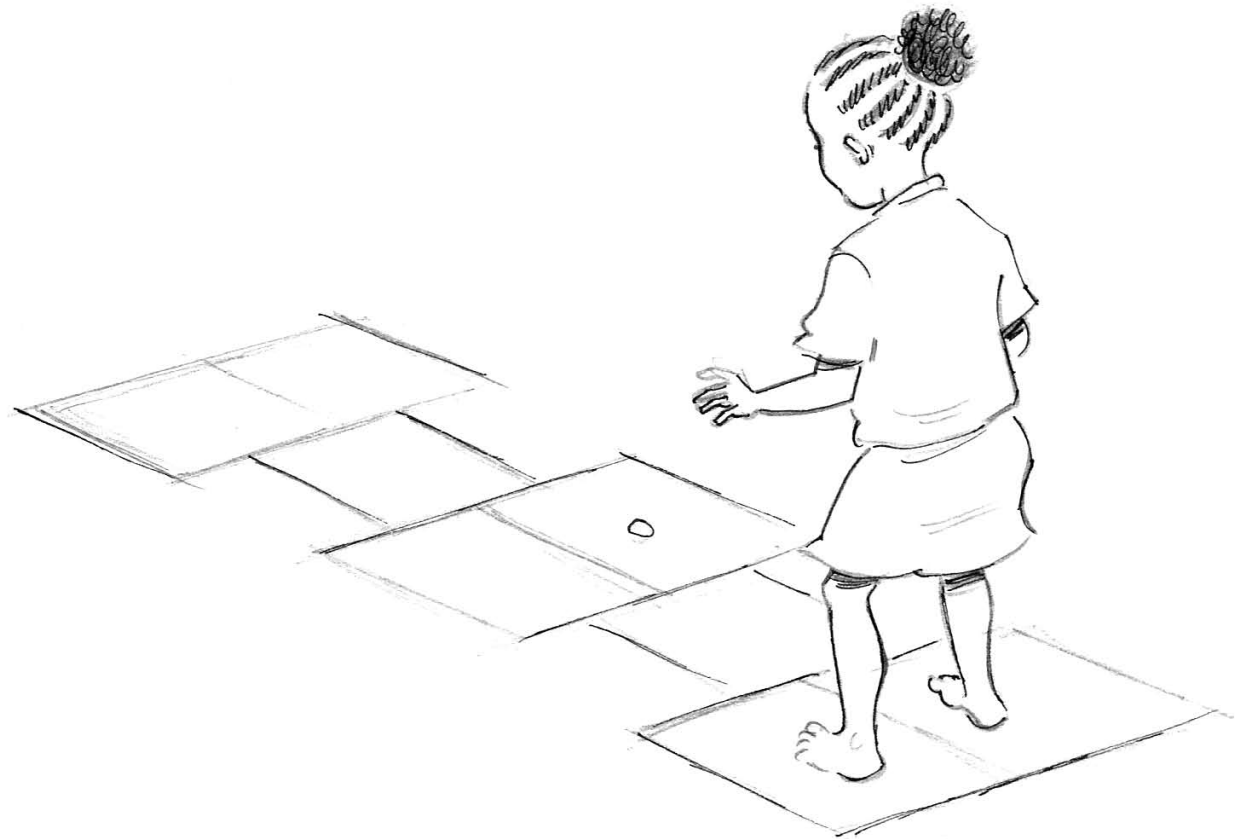
As you can see children's bodies become strong and balanced through these physical activities. Important things also happen in the brain when children do these physical actions, and this helps prepare them for writing, reading and understanding the world better. Today we're going to talk about how you can help children with this important brain work.

Some people say playing games together, following the rules that have been agreed on, is the start of learning about democracy.

What do you think?

Share with your group:

Let's start at the beginning. Do you remember that when your child first started crawling and then walking, it was difficult for the child? What does the child learn when he starts crawling and later walking?



Sum up:



All these activities which seem easy for us require a lot of brain work and body work for the child. (Demonstrate the action of crawling – showing how the child learns to balance, putting one hand out first and then the other, one leg out and then the other, co-ordinating the movement.) These activities take both strength and brain work! So we need to remember that young children learn a lot by **DOING**. We all have different strengths and weaknesses (things we find difficult or challenging). In your family your children also have different strengths and weaknesses. We must be careful not to compare children all the time. For example, don't say things like: ***You're so slow, why can't you run fast like your sister?*** Be aware of competition in the family – enjoying the game is more important than winning.

Activity 2

Facilitator talks:

Say to the group: "We're going to use the booklet now. I'll go through it with you and then you can take it home and try out some of these ideas. You will do those activities that suit your home life."

Working with the booklet: ***My body and space around me***, encourage questions and discussion, demonstrate activities and games, or encourage participants to demonstrate some of the activities.

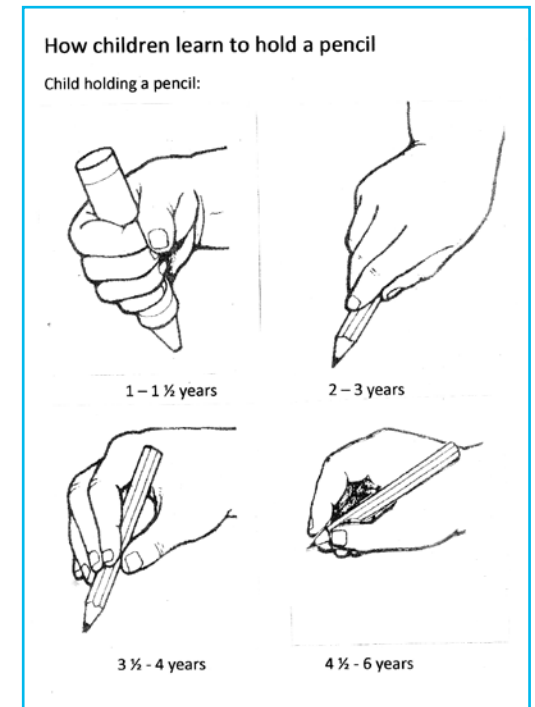
You may need to revise some of the information from Session 3 on drawing, particularly the notes on Mpendula and Blessing's drawings.



Activity 3

How children learn to hold a pencil: Chart 5

In these four pictures we can see how the child's little hand develops slowly through lots of practice. At first the child sort of clutches the crayon. Gradually as the muscles and co-ordination improves, the child is able to use the pencil easily without getting too tired. It's very difficult for children to start writing with a pencil in Grade 1 when they have never used thick crayons to practise with. When some children start Grade 1 they hold their pencils as is shown in the top picture. Some children manage easily and these little muscles develop naturally through their everyday activities. Some children need more help in strengthening these muscles. You will find lots of ideas in your booklet on how to strengthen these small muscles. Some people hold their pencil in a different way. The picture shows the most efficient way – so our hands and arms don't get too tired, and writing is easy.



Activity 4

Words and concepts related to our body and the space around us

See Handout: **Words and concepts A**

Say the following to the participants:

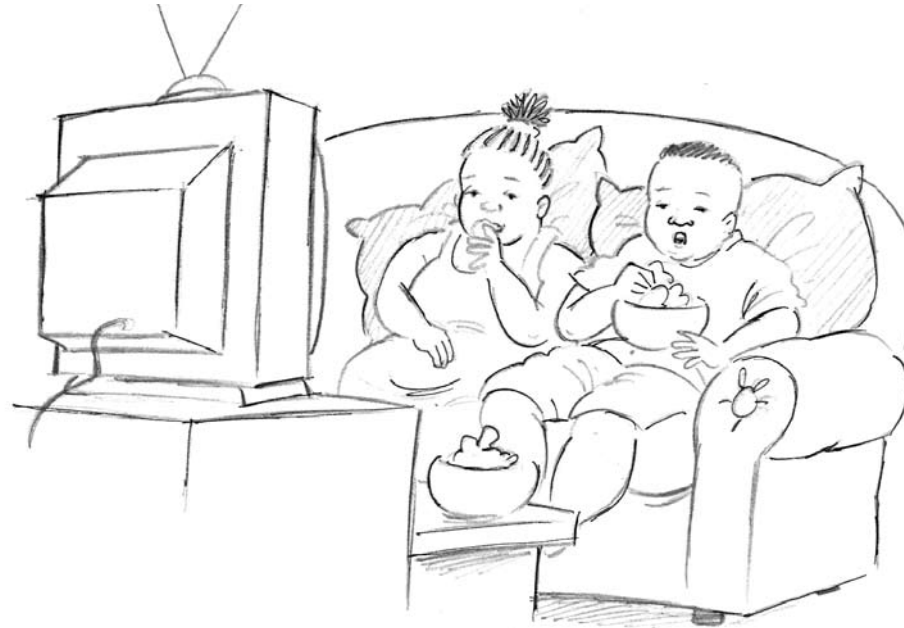
“As you know, there are lots of words related to our body and the space around us, which children need to understand.

These words help children to know more about the world, and later help with reading, writing and maths. These special words or concepts need to be talked through and used by children so they understand them in different situations.

Please think and talk together and then write down on your page where you think you could use these words at home so children understand them.”

Share with your partner:

Do you think problems develop when children spend too much time sitting in front of TV/video games and don't DO important actions? Why?



Helpful hint:

Be careful of naming and shaming! Some parents label their children from an early age, for example: “Oh you’re so clumsy! You’ve dropped the plate! Why can’t you be neat like your older sister?” Comments such as these won’t help the child to be more co-ordinated and can affect their self-esteem. Children have different strengths and weaknesses and develop at different paces. Encourage and support the child who has difficulty.

Sum up:

As you can see, it’s very important for children to move and play games which develop their big and small muscles, their sense of balance and a feeling of being comfortable in the space around them. We know that many problems can develop when a child is too still and quiet. Although it may be easier for the mother to always bundle the baby up or sit the child in front of the TV, CHILDREN LEARN BY MOVING AND DOING!

Activity 5:

Explain that you are going to read aloud but you want the group to cover their ears, making it difficult to hear. Alternatively you could whisper the words as you read so the group can't possibly hear. Read a part of the **Good hearing and learning** handout then ask: "Did you feel frustrated? Was it difficult?" Explain that many children suffer from ear infections in early childhood and this is sometimes difficult to diagnose. Generally when children have a bad ear infection the middle ear becomes blocked and they can't hear. This situation can last a long time.

- Discuss how poor hearing affects learning, especially language, including reading and writing.
- Discuss how you can tell when your child is not hearing as they should.
- Refer to the Handout: **Good hearing and learning**. Talk through the different points to make sure it is clearly understood.
- Refer to the hearing milestones and language milestones. You may want to give these out on request.

Activity 6

Homework tasks:

- Encourage parents to reflect on the session and the handouts and see where in their busy lives they can include some of these activities.
- Remind the group to refer to the handout: **Good hearing and learning** and the importance of good hearing.
- Preparation for the next session: Think about all the games you remember playing to do with numbers. Share them with the group next week.
- Hand out 2 more Little Books for the parents to make at home.

Helpful hint:

Before you start this session, you may want to find out about the local hospital or clinic with regards to referrals for hearing problems so parents know how to refer their child if they suspect a hearing loss.



Parents from Lantana Primary dancing

Session 6



Expected time: 2 ½ hours
(including snack time and personal question time)

Focus of the session:

Maths is fun and the world is your classroom!

I love everything especially the games – quote from a parent on the course

Purpose and content:

- Get feedback from parents on homework tasks, and answer their questions
- Talk about maths and concrete learning, getting ideas and games from the group
- Introduce and play simple dice games together
- Introduce concrete concepts that form the building blocks for maths, including: numbers, shape, size and measurement, matching and sorting and looking for patterns
- Help parents think and talk about ways to introduce easy concepts at home in an informal way
- Homework tasks



Suggested materials for the session:

- ✓ Plain newsprint
- ✓ Everyday things such as:
potatoes or pebbles to count;
cups of water to pour and
measure; a knife and an apple
to cut in half; sandwiches
cut in triangles, squares and
rectangles ; liquorice allsorts or
other foods in different shapes.
- ✓ If available – multilingual
dictionary with maths concepts

Suggested materials for each participant:

- ✓ Suggested materials for each
participant:
- ✓ Handout 15: cardboard games –
handouts: games x 2, dice with
samples of counters such as
buttons;
- ✓ Handout 14: “Words and
concepts, B”

Activity 1

Getting started:

- Welcome the group and chat about the homework tasks. You can do this together as a big group, or in pairs or small groups.
- Present the focus of the session

Share with your group:

Ask the group to think about the games they used to play as children, or they have played with their children, to do with numbers. Ask them to share their ideas and games. Make a mind map/chart – writing up the feedback as you did in the previous session.

Sum up:

There are lots of games and things to do – the world really is our classroom without formal maths. But we must do these things and take the fear out of maths. Remember, young children are often learning while they're playing.

These are some of the suggested games from different groups:
counting songs and rhymes; 5-stones game; dominoes; snakes and ladders; card games; dice games; measuring how far you can jump; reading car number plates – recognising the numbers, adding them and looking for patterns; counting wheels of cars or bikes; counting sweets to share; setting the table. Where possible, encourage the group to link their own traditional games with learning.



Children playing “five-stones

Activity 2

Facilitator talks:

Tell the group that you are now we're going to play together, and talk about what we mean when we say, "The world is our classroom!" As you work through the different ideas, refer to the games parents have suggested, when appropriate.

a. Numbers – first we need to know numbers (how many each number symbol stands for) and the order of numbers, and then we learn what to do with numbers – Suggestions:

Start with very easy counting from 1 to 5 (e.g. count fingers on one hand) then count to 10 and upwards; sing number songs and rhymes together; clap and march and dance too; look for numbers around you, such as house numbers, car number plates, telephone numbers, coins. First identify the spoken numbers, and later the written number names.

b. What we DO with numbers: Using numbers and number words and matching numbers to the amount of objects, – Suggestions:

Count everyday objects, first to 10 and then up to 30 and on. Notice your child's understanding of numbers and number words. For example: There are 6 of us, can you count out 6 spoons? Let's share these 12 sweets equally among the 4 of you – how many will you each get? Cut an apple in half, fold a tablecloth in half, show half the number of sweets. How many more do we need? Have we got enough to give everyone one? When you go shopping ask your child to help you. You can also make a pretend shop at home with pretend money and shopping lists.

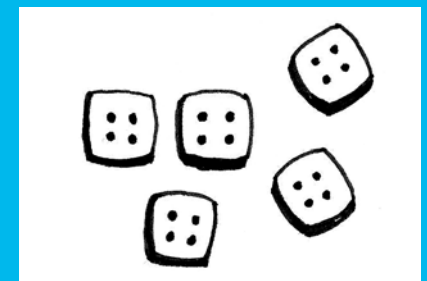
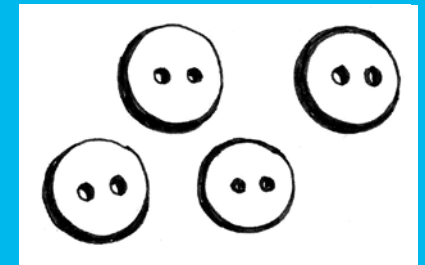
c. Play games together:

Give each participant two different board games, maths games x 2 in resource pack, a dice and counters (buttons or tops). Give the groups 10 – 15 minutes to play together. Encourage participants to think about what their children will learn from the game. Walk around and observe groups playing, assisting where necessary. Notice groups who are working well so they can feedback to the big group.



Helpful hint:

We suggest you use **CONCRETE** props as far as possible – for example, counting real objects; finding shapes in the room. Always ask parents for some ideas on the topic to get the conversation started. Some of the important math words can be introduced now, or later in the next activity.



Feedback on the game:

Get feedback from the groups on how to play the games and what children can learn. Remind parents that games are FUN, not competitions – they need to manage competition carefully. Also encourage the group to think about adapting the games for different age groups – how can they make the games more challenging for older children? What other games could they play at home similar to these ones?

d. Solving problems – Suggestions:

Encourage the parents to involve their children in solving simple everyday problems and finding logical solutions
For example:

“There are 6 of us and I’ve only got 3 apples – what do you think I should do?” or “I’m going to the shop to buy milk. It cost R5.00 but I’ve only got R3.00. How much more money will I need?”

Encourage children to make their own pretend shop using empty cartons and play money.

e. Estimating – Suggestions:

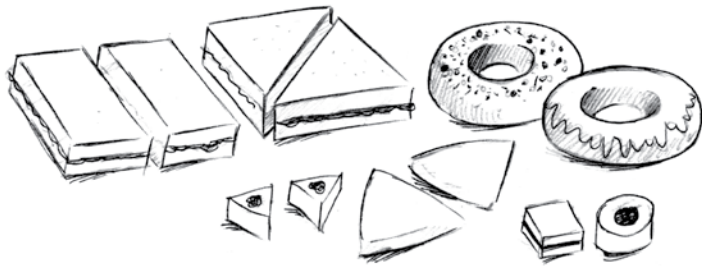
Encourage children to think and look for logical answers to simple problems or questions.

For example: “I wonder how many potatoes in this packet? What do you think? Let’s check.”



f. Knowing about space and shape – Suggestions:

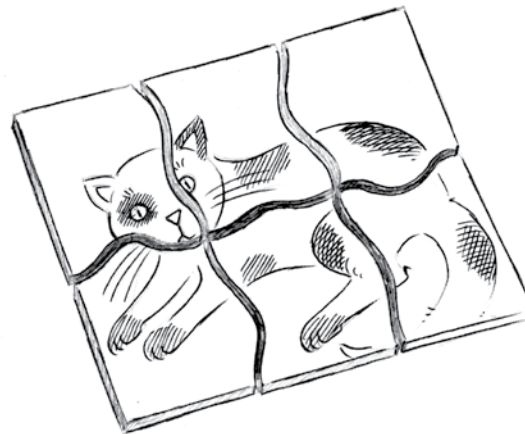
You could start by asking which objects can roll and which do we have to push. (Use a ball and a box to demonstrate). Then ask why we can roll the ball. (Because there are no corners on the ball – it's round. The box has corners – it's a cube). Now talk about the side of the box – what shape is it? (A square or rectangle). Ask the group to look for rectangles and squares around the room. You can do a similar activity with circles and then triangles. Keep asking questions such as “Which are big/small? How many corners does a triangle have?” (show examples of food in the shape of a triangle such as sandwiches, samoosas, liquorice allsorts). Cut out shapes together and create a picture or a flag. Look at the shapes in the South African flag. Construct towers and “castles” together using wooden blocks or off-cuts.



g. Puzzles – create your own very simple jigsaw puzzles. –

Suggestions:

Cut out two identical pictures (or draw them). Stick the pictures onto a piece of cardboard and if possible cover with clear plastic. Cut one of them into five pieces (or more for older children.) Children remake the picture, using the 2nd picture as a guide.



Helpful hint:

Be explicit as some parents may not be sure of the names of some of the shapes. Translate these words into the different languages in your group if necessary.

h. Understanding and talking about measurement – Suggestions:

Start by asking the group what they could measure at home and how they could measure things. Suggest measuring the height of family members, using their hand or the child's hand, as a measure. Suggest cooking together and measuring how much they use of different ingredients. They could play long jump and measure how far they jump. They could talk about longer and shorter and taller and shorter and measure the shoes in the family and arrange them in a row from smallest to biggest.

i. Matching, sorting, looking for patterns and talking more about colours – Suggestions:

You may start by looking at patterns in nature e.g. on shells or leaves, and talking about how they are the same or different. Give examples of things to sort such as washing, buttons, nails or screws and talk about how things are the same or different. Explain how all these activities help children NOTICE more. They are the building blocks for maths and science and help with early reading and writing.

j. Games with colours – Suggestions:

A colour game can be played in the same way as “I spy.” You say: “I’m thinking of something, it’s in the room and its blue – what is it?”

You can also think of playing colour riddles: “I’m thinking of something and it’s red, it’s round, it’s a fruit and you eat it” (Apple); “I’m thinking of something and it’s yellow, it’s longish it’s a fruit” (banana). Children could also collect pictures or objects of their favourite colour.



Activity 3

Share with your group:

Give each participant a copy of the handout: **Words and concepts B** and explain that it's good for children to really understand the meaning of these words – in their home language and school language. We need to introduce the words at home informally, in different situations. Give some practical suggestions to suit the context of your group. If necessary translate the words into the different home languages in your group. Give the group about 10 to 15 minutes to discuss the handout.

Sum up:

These concepts are some of the building blocks for maths – as you can see, formal maths is based on all this important knowledge. You can see maths is really fun and you CAN do it!

Activity 4

Homework tasks:

- Give each participant two games and if possible a dice to take home. Encourage everyone to be creative with and decorate their games. Give suggestions on how to make the game more interesting for older children. For example: make colourful cards and colour some of the spaces on the board, the same colours. When the child lands on a green space she takes a green card, turns it over and reads the message. This could be “move on two spaces” or “Have an extra turn, the wind is behind you.” If she lands on the red

card the message could be, "Miss a turn, you have a flat tyre!" The "chicken-and-hen game" lends itself to creating a story – what happens to the chicken on the way home to its mother?

- Encourage parents to find opportunities to introduce some of the concept words informally, without any pressure.
- Remind the group that next week is the last session in the first series. Those participants who have attended five of the seven sessions, including next week, will get a certificate. Check everybody has signed the register and you have the correct spelling of participant's names for certificates. If possible organise a small celebration for the last session and share some eats together.
- Encourage the group to bring all the booklets and games they have made to display next week.



Games and little books made by parents at home

Session 7



Expected time: 2 ½ hours

Focus of the session:

Summary of what we've learnt together, questions, certificates and celebration!

I liked everything of the course because I never had an opportunity of teaching any of my children and now have the privilege to teach even my grandchild – Quote from a grandparent on a previous course.

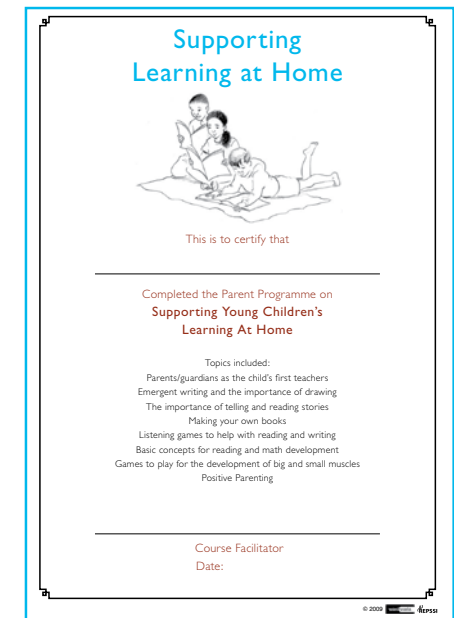
Purpose and content:

- Get feedback from parents on homework task and answer their questions
- Work through the booklet, **Supporting learning at home**, together
- Get feedback on the course – oral or written
- Plan a follow-up session and get suggestions regarding their needs
- Encourage the group to build their own support group – this may include forming a committee
- Hand out certificates and celebrate !



Suggested materials for the session:

- ✓ Booklet: "Supporting learning at home" for each participant
- ✓ Certificates for those who have attended 5 sessions
- ✓ Feedback forms



Activity 1

Getting started:

- Welcome the group and chat about the homework tasks. You can do this together as a big group or in pairs or small groups
- Encourage everyone to display their children's booklets and games on the table set aside for this purpose
- Present the focus of the session

Activity 2

Share with your group:

Give each participant the booklet, **Supporting Learning at Home** (if possible in the participant's home language). Either work through the booklet as a big group OR work in small groups using the group activity instructions below. If you use the second option, give each group one or two pages to discuss, in this way you will cover the whole booklet and get everyone talking.



Parents from Cornflower and Hyacinth Primary discussing ideas from the booklet.

Group activity:

Ask the group to do the following:
“Read your pages together, one paragraph at a time. Ask questions and share ideas about what has worked for you.

Choose 4 ideas from section of the booklet you are working with, and share these with the big group. Please include ideas or examples of how these ideas or games have worked for you and your child.”

Make sure everyone in the group feels comfortable with the material in the booklet

Ask questions about the material if you are unsure.

Feedback from groups:

When parents give feedback after the group activity, encourage them to use their own examples to explain or illustrate different points. In most situations you will have to elaborate and clarify different points as well.

Sum up:

Explain to the group that the booklet is theirs to take home. It is a summary of some of the information covered over the 7 weeks. They can use it as a reminder to continue the learning journey they have started with their children. Remind the group of the other booklet: *My body and space*. They should also continue with their journal.

Activity 3

Group or individual activity – Giving feedback:

Explain to the group that it's important for them to give you feedback on the course and you value their comments and opinions. They don't have to put their names on the form and they can work as a group or individually. (Some people may prefer to give oral feedback, and your feedback form will differ from group to group.)

Activity 4

Handing out certificates:

This is generally a very positive session. Encourage somebody respected by the group to assist you in handing out certificates. This may be the principal or librarian.

Helpful hint:

You may find that a number of parents in the groups do not summarise the information in the booklet adequately, and focus only on one or two aspects. Give the groups an opportunity to speak and then add to their summaries as you go along, using positive support throughout.



Parents, teachers and librarians at Phillippi East library, Western Cape, with certificates

Activity 5

Planning ahead:

A follow-up session is optional. However, it is important that the group is encouraged to continue meeting. For this reason they will need to form a small committee. Discuss their suggestions for inviting outside speakers, and if possible give the contact details of various agencies in the area.

Activity 6

Thanks and closure:

This is a very personal part of the programme and it is important to enjoy it with the group in a way that feels appropriate. Some groups like to sing or pray together while others like to make speeches. You choose what is right for each group.

Helpful hint:

For many parents this may be the first time they have received a certificate, and you need to honour this important occasion. At the same time you will have to be sensitive to those who may be feeling left out because they were not able to attend five sessions. If possible, encourage them to attend sessions they missed when you run a new course.

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Appendix I

Some suggestions to encourage participation and learning in your group:

1. **Be a listener:** Listen carefully during sessions and make time after the session when parents can talk to you in private. Show you are listening, try not to interrupt and if necessary ask “checking questions” (e.g. I just want to check I understood you correctly, did you mean ...?)
2. **You cannot know it all:** If you're not sure how to answer, be honest and consult someone who might know or refer the parent to an outside agency.
3. **Experiential learning generally works best.** Provide plenty of opportunities for group work, talking and doing – play games, read or tell stories together, draw, write messages and share ideas.
4. **Build leaders.** You will find that in most groups natural leaders emerge. Encourage positive leaders and role models but don't allow one or two people to dominate the group – make it clear from the start that you will be giving each person an opportunity to share their ideas.
5. **Acknowledge different languages and cultures and reinforce the equality of all participants.** Everyone wears a name tag; arrange the seats in a circle at least for the first and last session; encourage respectful listening and interaction during the sessions; develop an informal buddy system to ease the way for shy parents.
6. **Provide opportunities for parents to learn from their experience.** It's very empowering for parents to realise that they can use their own experiences to find solutions. They see that knowledge is not just the property of experts but that everyone has something to contribute.
7. **Ask positive questions.** Sometimes we tend to always look at problems. It's important to ask questions that help people recognise and build on their strengths. (For example – What's working well in your family/ community?)
8. **Watch your body language and that of the group.** As you know body language tells us a lot about people's feelings and attitudes. Be alert to your own body language and that of the group.

9. **Build relationships with the group.** Be yourself and try not to have favourites. Be friendly and unpretentious, while at the same time maintaining your role as facilitator. Use welcoming language, (e.g. It's so good to see you all again – it's raining and you're all here. This makes me feel so privileged to be working with you.) Adults generally like to have some say in decisions and don't like to be bossed around so allow the group to make certain decisions such as what time you have tea.
10. **Use team work.** Work with a buddy – two heads are often better than one. Together keep the atmosphere positive and constructive throughout the programme. Expect to have a lot of fun!

Appendix 2:

Planning: outline for session

Time	Activity	Resources

Appendix 3

Some examples of questions asked by parents and possible answers:

My child is four years old and he sort of stutters when he talks. What can I do?

Many young children experience this, particularly when they get excited and just can't get the words out fast enough! It's very important at this stage that we don't over react to their lack of fluency. Please make sure others in the family don't tease him or tell him to speak "properly". Try and create a calm space for him to talk with you and notice when his speech is fluent and when it is not. If it gets much worse, then it would be good to speak to a speech therapist or find out more about *developmental dysfluency* and stuttering.

My child is three years old and she isn't really talking like the other children. She can say a few words but it's more like baby talk. What should I do?

You are wise to be concerned about your child. When children are not communicating as they should, one of the first things we do is to check whether they are hearing well. If her hearing is good and she hasn't a history of a hearing problem, then you will need to find out more about her general development. Also keep in mind that children learn language

through talking and listening and playing with others, particularly more competent speakers. If she is alone or with people who hardly speak with her, she probably will only say a few words. Find out about your local clinic (developmental clinic) and in the meantime use all the suggestions we have given you on how to support language.

We speak Afrikaans at home and my child is here in an English class because the Afrikaans class was full. The teacher says I must not speak Afrikaans to my child only English, what shall I do?

As you know now, it is very important to continue to speak with your child in your home language. Children need strong home language on which to build their second/additional language. If your child is learning in English it's important to support both languages. You could tell or read stories in English some days and Afrikaans on other days. I'm sure the teacher just wants the best for your child. Perhaps we could meet together and chat about this issue.

I think my sister's older boy is abusing my six-year-old child. Do you think I should tell anyone? Who can I speak to?

Yes, you are right to be worried about your child, and yes, you must speak to someone about it, even though this is a difficult situation. It is best to speak to a social worker or counsellor who knows how to deal with abuse of children. I will give you the contact details of someone who can help you. In the meantime make sure your child and the older boy are not left alone together.

My child is in Grade 1 and sometimes she writes her letters the wrong way round. What should I do?

Young children who are learning to write are still developing pencil control. Their letters might not be the same size, and they might find it difficult to write between the lines. They might also write some letters the wrong way. This is all a normal part of the process of learning to write and if we focus too much on neat writing, then children become very anxious about making mistakes. It is important that we show children the correct way of forming letters. It is a good idea to get them to write big letters in the sand, on a blackboard, or on a concrete floor with a paintbrush dipped in water. Once they can feel how to write these big letters, then it will be easier for them to write them on paper. Talk to the teacher later in the year and see how she's getting on.

I didn't want to tell you but now I want to explain that I left school in Grade 3 and I don't read well. I am afraid you will ask me a question and I won't be able to give the answer.

Thank you for talking to me about how you are feeling. I want to assure you that this course is about how we can help our children, not about who can read well or who can't. As parents we have so much to teach our children, even if we can't read well. Please enjoy the course and make sure you ask questions if there are things you're not sure about.

Glossary notes:

Section 1:

Resilience

(The information on resilience is taken largely from Ilse Appelt's unpublished DPhil thesis: "Doing Hope" in families and communities: Co-creating resilience after trauma. Stellenbosch University, 2006)

The dictionary defines resilience as **"being capable of returning to normal after stress"** and **"recovering quickly from shock"**. A researcher, Michael Rutter (1987), defines resilience as **"the observation that some individuals, in spite of adverse circumstances or stress, do not develop negative outcomes but overcome life's hazards"**

In his research, Van Niekerk (2002) found that children often managed adequately with trauma - only about 25% of children exposed to severe trauma developed severe psychological problems.

How do we help children become more resilient? Many people have studied and researched this topic and these are some of the suggestions from this research:

Children are most likely to cope well with community violence if they have a good sense of who they are, reasonable self control, an understanding of themselves and a positive view of life

Resilience does not seem to be a fixed characteristic but depends on the exposure to trauma and support at the time.

Two researchers from Cape Town, Van der Merwe and Dawes (2005) concluded that children exposed to community violence showed varied post-traumatic effects depending on ***"the quality of care provided at familial level"*** and ***"the availability of social support"*** (Van der Merwe & Dawes, 2005).

Weingarten talks about the importance of "doing hope" her findings support the idea that hope can be done in a community of caring others. Weingarten (2000) adds an interesting community focus in her reflection on hope: **Matters of life and death are too hard, too onerous, too painful, to 'do' alone. Hope is too important – its effects on body and soul too significant - to be left to individuals alone. Hope must be the responsibility of the community.**

The Circle of Courage

The circle of courage was developed by three people: L Bendtro, M Brokenleg and S Van Brokern. It is based on the Native American orientation to life but has parallels in other cultures. It is a framework for developing respectful and empowered children based on the values of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity. The philosophy has become known as the Circle of Courage.

Reference: Bendtro L et al, Reclaiming youth at risk (1992)

Self-esteem

Self-esteem is a person's attitude about himself or herself. It's a person's estimation of how capable and worthwhile he or she is. It isn't pride or conceit, nor is it an overinflated opinion about a person's own ability. People with positive self-esteem generally perceive themselves realistically. They understand their strengths and are ready to admit their weaknesses. People with positive self-esteem do not compare themselves to others or devalue the success of those around them.

Self-esteem has been described as something that comes from the feedback—real or imagined—we receive from others. We tend to value ourselves in the way we believe other people value us.

If self-esteem comes from others, young people must have “others” around them. If they grow up in a socially isolated environment where there is little contact with other people—especially adults—the opportunity to develop a positive self-esteem is diminished.

Here are some simple ways to help develop positive self-esteem in our children:

- Focus on loving them, rather than judging their behaviours or academic successes.
- Spend quality time with them on a regular basis - talk, listen and enjoy their company.
- Develop an honest interest in them; be interested in what they are doing.
- Identify what they do well and help them discover their strengths and weaknesses.
- For children to develop positive self-esteem, they need other people in their lives. Parents are essential, but other adults matter too. You can make a difference in the lives of young people without much effort on your part.

Reference: www.reclaiming.com/content/about-circle-of-courage

Bendtro L et al, Reclaiming youth at risk (1992)

Scaffolding

The term “scaffolding” was coined by Bruner in 1976. (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976)
Today “scaffolding” is used to describe how an expert (be it a parent, teacher or more competent child) can facilitate the learner’s transition from assisted to independent performance. The “scaffolds” provided by a teacher/parent do not make the task itself easier, but rather make it possible for a learner to complete the task with support. Initially, the maximum amount of teacher assistance is needed to elevate the student’s performance to its highest potential level. Gradually, the level of assistance decreases, as the learner becomes capable of doing more independently. At this point, the teacher “hands over” the responsibility for the performance to the learner, removing the scaffolds. In Vygotsky’s words, “What the child is able to do in collaboration today he will be able to do independently tomorrow” (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 211).

For scaffolding to be successful, teachers must help learners develop **strategies** they can apply to novel problems they will encounter, not just answers to specific questions. For example, when a child is confronted by an unknown word, rather than telling the child the word, the teacher may scaffold problem-solving by prompting the child to use strategies within his or her range, such as using pictures for clues. Eventually, the child no longer needs the teacher’s help, and can activate the necessary strategy unprompted.

Information on scaffolding from: from: Bodrova, E. et al, Scaffolding Emergent Writing in the Zone of Proximal Development. (1998) Literacy Teaching & Learning Vol 3,2

Section 2:

Section 2: with permission from Dr. Shelley O’Carroll. (2009) Community-school partnerships. REPSSI

Grade R/Reception: The preschool year before formal schooling begins

Grade One: The first year of formal schooling

Invented spelling: spelling of a word is not correct but is an approximate version of the word based on the sounds a child hears when he/she says the word.

Emergent writing: We want young children to ‘write’ so that they can see that writing is a meaningful activity and a way of conveying a message. When we talk about emergent writing we are referring to scribbling, using random letters/ letterlike forms and invented spelling.

Phonological awareness: the awareness that that speech is made up of sounds

Phonemic awareness: ‘the ability to notice, think about, and work with individual sounds in spoken words. Before children learn to read print, they need to become aware of how sounds in words work. They need to understand that words are made up of speech sounds or phonemes. Phonemes are the smallest parts of sound in a spoken word’ (p. 12, Department of Education).

Blending: listening to syllables or sounds and combining them to form a word.

Segmenting: breaking a word into syllables or sounds.

Vowels: the letters a, e, i, o, u and any combinations if these letters

Consonants: all the remaining letters that are not vowels e.g. b,c,d, f, g, h, j....

Resource List: Charts, handouts and booklets

Session	Description
1	Chart 1: How do young children learn best (9 x A4 pages)
1/Background reading	Table with examples of how children learn
1	Circle of courage (Handout)
2	Language: How young children learn (Handout)
2	Language for thinking and learning (Handout)
2	Read a story so children want to listen (Handout)
2	What do children learn from stories? (Handout)
2	Sequence pictures: Baby Bird looks for his mother (Handout) Story: Baby bird looks for his mother + more sequence pictures
3	Chart 2: Mpendula's drawing A & B
3	Chart 3: Blessing's drawing A & B
3	Chart 4: Drawing and emergent writing (3 pictures)
3/5	Chart 5: Learning to hold a pencil
3	Have-a-go writing (Handout)
3/4	How to do shared writing (Handout)
4	Alphabet chart in English (Handout)

Session	Description
4, 5, 6	Story booklets: Can you find me; Things I can do; Things I like; A kennel for Spot; How I was my socks; Tom the dog; Monkey and Rabbit; Instructions for making little books
4	Games to play for better reading and writing (Handout)
4	Reading with your whole brain (Handout)
4	Tips from good readers (Handout)
5	Good Hearing and learning (Handouts) Developmental milestones for hearing and for language
5 and 6	Words and concepts, A & B (Handout)
5	Booklet: My body and space around me
6	Maths games X 2 (Handouts)
7	Booklet: Supporting learning at home (English)
7	Certificate

Resource List: Handouts and booklets in other languages

Session	Description
4	Alphabet charts in Afrikaans & isiXhosa (Handout)
4	Story booklets: Waar is ek?; Kyk wat ek kan doen! (Afrikaans) Ungandifumana? ; Konke ngam! (isiXhosa)
7	Booklet: Ondersteuning vir leer tuis (Afrikaans) Ukuxhasa nokukhuthaza ukufunda ekhaya (isiXhosa)



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WORDWORKS: www.wordworks.org.za; REPSSI: www.repssi.org; P.O.Box 1669, Randburg, 2125, South Africa, tel +27 11 998 5820

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