

Tips for Families:

Understand how the pandemic impacted kids' language and literacy

Your kids learn literacy and language skills at home, at school and in the community. The pandemic disrupted

each of these areas, affecting the development of early literacy and language for many children.



SCHOOL

In the first year of the pandemic, childcare settings and schools closed to cut the spread of the virus, and learning moved online. When schools re-opened, everyone had to adapt to changes with the new in-person learning environment.

Reading levels dropped.

- In March 2021, fifty-five percent of Grade 1 students in virtual school were behind in reading. Pre-pandemic, this number was only forty-five percent.

(Source: Toronto District School Board)



Children missed out on learning from seeing people's faces.

- Many teachers, educators, and children wore masks.
- Babies as young as 8 months learn language and speech from watching mouths. Masks make it harder to see facial expressions.
- Seeing facial expressions is important for learning to understand language and the meaning behind what people are saying.



Online school was difficult to access.

- Young children often have short attention spans. This makes it difficult to focus for long periods of time online.
- Teaching online was difficult for teachers. For children under six, it was hard to create a "language-rich" environment.
- Technology was a barrier. Not everyone had reliable internet.
- Not everyone had a device that their children could use for online school. Low-income households were more likely to have less than one device for each child.



Daycare/kindergarten enrollment decreased.

- The number of kids in regulated and unregulated childcare in 2020 was eight percent lower than in 2019.
- Some school boards reported that kindergarten enrollment dropped during the pandemic. These children missed that crucial first year of school.



For more information on early literacy and language development, please visit the Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation at www.childrensliteracy.ca



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HOME

Spending more time in the home affected kids' language and learning environment.

Screen time went up dramatically.

- Unfortunately, increased screen time can cause lower language and literacy scores in preschool.



Physical activity levels dropped.

- Physical health and well-being are key aspects of a child's readiness for school. Physical activity levels affect both physical development and mental health. Active students have better grades, school attendance, memory, and can stay on task in the classroom.



Families faced social, emotional, and financial stresses.

- Evidence shows the pandemic may have increased work-family conflict and alcohol use at home between couples whose children were homeschooled.
- Stresses like these can lead to conflict in the home, use of harsh words, and yelling or shouting. When kids have unstable interactions with adults in their home or think their parents are in distress, they tend to face barriers to developing the skills they need for school.



COMMUNITY

When public services and community centres closed, children's overall development suffered.

Document prepared August 2022 based on available data.

Babies' hearing problems may have gone undiagnosed.

- Hearing is important to the development of speech, language and early literacy skills. Due to hospital restrictions, newborn hearing screening programs were postponed in some areas. Delays in testing can delay learning about and addressing a child's hearing problem.



Children, many with disabilities, missed out on at-home programs.

- Many programs previously offered at-home moved online. In some cases, virtual programs can lack the rich, interactive qualities of in-person sessions.
- Without in-person sessions, children with disabilities couldn't gain the same cognitive, emotional and social benefits that face-to-face learning would have provided.



Fewer children and families were accessing health services.

- This matters to a child's early literacy and language development because developmental delays are often identified during routine checks by the primary care physician, or when the family raises concerns with their healthcare provider. When these routine checks don't happen, developmental delays can go unnoticed.



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