Early Literacy Conversation Guide for Healthcare Practitioners

Key Messages for Parents:

- You have what it takes to be your child's first and most important teacher.
- Your little one learns so much when you talk, sing and share stories together in a loving way.
- Your baby is always watching, listening and learning, even when they aren't talking yet.
- Use the language or languages you feel most comfortable speaking.



This guide embraces Inuit cultural values.

Inunnguiniq is the process of raising a child to be a capable person.

- This guide includes activities based on Inunnguiniq principles that support young children to develop language and early literacy skills.
- This guide shares specific **Advice from Elders** (\$\sqrt{\text{\text{\$\gamma}}}\text{ below}).
 - These tips are chosen from Inunnguiniq Childrearing Advice from Inuit Elders. It was compiled
 for the Centres of Excellence for Children's Well-Being and now copyrighted and published by
 the Qaujigiartiit Health Research Centre (QHRC) through their Inunnguiniq program.

What practitioners can do and say to families at health visits

Ideas for sharing stories/books

Birth to 6 Months

Ask the family about what they like to do with the baby (making faces, singing, cuddling etc.)

• "This is a really important time for your baby's brain development. The games you play and the words they hear from you help their brain grow."

S Advice from Elders

- Talk to your baby all the time. Encourage the baby to watch what you are doing so they will be entertained, become observant, and learn.
- Sing, chant, and play word games.
- Make eye contact, aqqaq, and caress the child a lot.
- Make faces and encourage them to copy.

Your baby wants to hear your voice.

- Cuddle up together.
- Tell your baby stories about their family, places you've been or things you see in their books or around your home.
- Share books with images with high contrast (often black and white). These are easier for babies to see. Babies also like books with faces.
- Follow your baby's cues. You don't have to read the whole book.

6 Months to 1 Year

Ask the family how they see their baby trying to communicate (pointing, making sounds, saying words, etc.).

 "It's great to chat with your baby as you go along in your daily routine. 'Here's your sock. It goes on your foot.' Point to things you see and name them."

Advice from Elders

- You can help your child develop language skills by speaking to them all the time. Repeat the sounds and words they make.
- Sing and chant. This calms babies. They feel secure. Sing songs or family aqqait or pisiit or chants.
- Parents should limit TV time, so the TV doesn't become the baby's teacher.

As you tell or read stories:

- Use your voice to make the story more interesting.
- Add actions or make faces to help tell the story.
- Help your child turn the pages as you hold the book
- Name and count things in the book as you point to them.
 - "How many puppies? 1-2-3-4. I see four puppies."

1 to 2 Years

Ask the family about what they enjoy doing with their little one and how they see their language skills changing.

 "Is your child understanding and speaking more words? Are they pointing to things and naming them?"

Advice from Elders

- Talk, talk, talk. Use a lot of language all the time. The child is absorbing everything they hear.
- Tell stories. Read to them. Sing songs together. Encourage children to listen carefully for details.

When you tell stories and share books:

- Help your child turn the pages.
- Point out details of what you see:
 - o Colours: "The clouds are white."
 - Size: "This mitten is small. But this mitten is big."
 - Shapes: "The clock is round."
- Ask questions.
 - o "Where's her hat?

2 to 3 Years

Ask the family about what they and their little one enjoy doing together.

• "Do they like to sing or share stories? Is the little one interested in books?"

S Advice from Elders

- Talk with your child. Ask them what they are thinking about. Get to know their personality.
- Help your child talk about emotions. You can do this
 by making faces and asking your child to name what
 you are expressing. Ask them what they think made
 you feel that way.
- Visit grandparents. Have your child spend lots of time with grandparents. Encourage grandparents to tell stories and teach Inuit sayings (inusipagutit).

Ask other people in the family to share stories or read to the little one, too.

When you tell stories and share books:

- Ask about how the people in the story were feeling.
 - "Were they happy or sad? How can they tell?"
- Ask your child to find and point to pictures:
 - "Show me the seal. Where does the boat go?"
- Count together what you see in books.
- Point at the words as you read.
 - This helps your child start to notice and name the marks on the page and connect them with their sounds.
- Help them learn the sounds but keep it fun.

4-5 Years

Ask the family about plans and feelings about starting school.

Advice from Elders

- Help your child prepare to start school. Talk with your child about being with a large group of children. Tell them what you expect from them when they are at school.
- Talk about emotions. Discuss emotions openly and use proper words to teach the child how to talk about their emotions. Teach the child which emotions to express openly and which emotions to control, such as anger and jealousy. Help the child learn to control these feelings.
- Support your child's language development at this age by playing word games to name specific items.
 Help your child recognize and properly name items such as different birds, plants, or tools.
- Strengthen your child's observation skills. You could collect items from the land together. Talk about everything you know about each item. Encourage the child to share what she knows with others who visit.
- Ask questions! Pose questions that will encourage the child to think of solutions to various challenges.

As you tell stories or share books:

- Stop sometimes and ask them to tell you what will happen next.
- Look at the cover and ask what they think the book is about.
- Make connections to the child's life:
 - "This girl likes to visit her grandma. You like to visit grandma."
- Talk about how the characters in the book are feeling:
 - o "This boy looks excited. He has a big smile on his face. His hands are up high!"
- Point at the words as you read.
 - This helps your child start to notice the syllabics or letters on the page and connect them with their sounds.
- Help them learn the sounds of the printed words, but don't let that get in the way of enjoying the story.

Which language?

- Speak the language or languages you feel most comfortable with.
- Your child's brain is wired to learn languages in the early years, before five. This is the best time to expose them to languages.
- Remember that a child will learn English because it is used in our communities on radio, TV and other places. Inuktut is mainly learned in the home. If you are able, make this a priority.



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