

Trip to the Grocery Store— Writing (Environmental Print)

What the Research Says

- Parents can play a key role in fostering positive early learning opportunities that have an important impact on their child's emergent literacy skill development prior to school entry.
- Environmental print provides many rich and meaningful examples for the parent to show that print conveys meaning and is constructed with letters that have names and make sounds.
- Young children are aware from an early age that environmental print, such as product labels, clothing, road signs, and advertisements, communicates meaning.
- The use of environmental print during parent-child interactions provides a meaningful way to expose children to literacy concepts like letter shapes and letter sounds.
- A preschool child's print knowledge and interest in reading will increase as parents and caregivers initiate literacy activities in and outside of the home.

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Activities for Families

- Model “reading the world” as you go through the day with your child. For example, touch the word “push” and say, “push” when the door says, “push” to enter. Point to the word “exit” and say, “Exit. That’s where we get out.” Point to the word “closed” and say, “Closed. We’ll have to come back when it says, “open.
- Use plastic or magnetic letters during playtime.
- Have a child form letter shapes when playing with clay, string, or cooked spaghetti.
- Have a child form letter shapes with sticks found outside or straws found inside the house.
- While making cookies a child could make letters out of the dough being used.
- Create a pretend toy store or grocery store. Children can make signs, labels, advertisements, and prices to sell their items. This is effective when an adult interacts in play within the same setting.
- Using a cardboard box, a child could create a television and put on a segment of the news. Homemade signs could be used for commercials shown between news stories.
- Create a “Reading Bag” by using a re-sealable clear plastic bag. Put many examples of environmental print in the bag.
- Have an “Environmental Print T-Shirt Day”. Have child read his shirt and other shirts he/she sees.
- Have child match letters found on different labels.
- Using a finger, trace each letter or word found on products in the house.
- Draw, design, and write your own environmental print.

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Advice to Parents

What is Environmental Print?

Environmental print is the print found in the everyday life of a child's natural environment. These may include: clothing brand names, t-shirt messages, personal name tags, food packaging, product labels, advertisements, mail, magazines, restaurants, websites, road signs, television advertisements, and billboards. At home this may include: calendars, grocery lists, or other personal writings of family members.

Why is Knowing About Environmental Print Important for Parents?

- Children who grow up in a print-rich environment seem to understand that print is different from other kinds of visual patterns in their environment. They notice that adults use print in different ways. They begin to understand that print symbolizes language and holds information. For example, the menu will tell them what they can order to eat. The advertising in a magazine will tell them what can be bought at the store.
- A very important first step in reading is understanding that print carries meaning. Environmental print provides many examples for the parent to show that the print in the child's world conveys meaning. That this print contains letters and each letter has a name and a sound associated with it.
- Through environmental print, children are able to learn that words represent objects or ideas. This is a great skill to have before entering kindergarten.
- When exposed to environmental print, children gain confidence in their beginning literacy experiences because they are entering school with a number of "words" that they already know.
- Environmental print is inexpensive, highly accessible, and available to parents from a wide-range of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds.
- Environmental print is found everywhere, so it is a natural starting point to talk to children about reading, writing, and mathematics.
- Because environmental print is found in the everyday life of a child, it often connects to his/her own individual interests and backgrounds.
- Environmental print is relatively stable. Stop signs don't move and product names and labels on cereal boxes, for example, usually stay the same.

- Letters that are accessible on environmental print tend to be large and upper case, which is easier for children to see and recognize.
- Because working with environmental print is a parent-child interaction, children display high levels of motivation to “read”.