

SECTION 1

The History of Family Literacy Day®

Family Literacy Day, held annually on January 27, was developed by ABC Life Literacy Canada (formerly ABC CANADA Literacy Foundation) in 1999 to celebrate adults and children reading and learning together, and to encourage Canadian families to spend at least 15 minutes a day enjoying a learning activity together.



Q: What is family literacy?

Family literacy focuses on parents as the means to improve the reading and writing skills of all family members. By reading to children and engaging in fun literacy activities, parents are actively keeping their own skills sharp, while at the same time strengthening the relationship between the family. This, in turn, encourages lifelong learning. There are many activities that help strengthen literacy skills, and all it takes is 15 minutes of practice every day.

Q: Why is family literacy important?

Family literacy helps reinforce the importance of learning with children as a means of building the knowledge necessary for future skills, and helps adults maintain their literacy skills. Many studies have shown that improving parents' skills directly and positively affects the language development of children (*Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society, IALS 1997*).

Q: How is Family Literacy Day celebrated?

Every year, thousands of events and activities are coordinated by literacy providers, schools, libraries and community groups across the country (visit www.FamilyLiteracyDay.ca for a listing of events or to register your event). These activities range from fundraisers, book drives and children's reading circles, to literacy-themed games and contests. You don't have to participate in a formal event to be a part of this initiative. Family Literacy Day can be celebrated by simply setting aside 15 minutes of family time to read, play a game, write a letter, or even follow a recipe together.

Q: How do local communities and organizations benefit from Family Literacy Day?

Literacy providers have the opportunity to showcase their hard work and achievements on Family Literacy Day. They benefit from increased public awareness and support, and have the opportunity to connect with key influencers in their community. Family Literacy Day is a great time to spread the word about the importance of reading as a daily activity. This initiative also provides an opportunity for families to become aware of literacy programs available in their community. Family Literacy Day is also sometimes used as a fundraiser, where literacy groups and libraries can raise much-needed funds for literacy programming or new supplies.

Quick Facts on Literacy

Adult Literacy in Canada

- Approximately 94 per cent of Canadians 'agree' that 'Canadians' literacy skills are critical to quality of life' (Ipsos Reid, 2010). Yet, 42 per cent of adult Canadians have low literacy skills that do not enable them to cope with the demands of everyday life and work.
- Of those 42 per cent, 15 per cent function at the lowest level, where individuals may, for example, be unable to read the dosage instructions on a medicine bottle.
- In Canada and the US, adults who score at the two lowest literacy skill levels (the 42 per cent of adult Canadians mentioned above) are about two times more likely to be unemployed for six months or longer, compared with those whose skills levels are higher.
- Almost half (49.8 per cent) of adult Canadians score in the two lowest skill levels in numeracy, and these people are 2.5 times more likely to be recipients of social assistance, compared with those who scored higher in numeracy. impact on literacy scores.

Family Literacy

- Family literacy refers to the many ways families develop and use literacy skills, from enjoying a storybook together, to playing with word games, singing, writing to a relative or friend, sharing day-to-day tasks such as making a shopping list or using a recipe, and surfing the Internet for fun and interesting sites.
- Reading to children more than once a day has a substantial positive impact on their future academic skills. In addition, research indicates that children with early exposure to books and reading are better at performing mathematical tasks.
- Children aged 2 to 3 who are read to several times a day do substantially better in kindergarten at the age of 4 and 5 than youngsters who are read to only a few times a week or less.
- Having a parent read aloud with their children helps children learn listening, vocabulary and language skills, and develop imagination and creativity.
- Parents should pay careful attention to three potential reading slumps that can hinder a child's reading development: upon entering kindergarten; at grade 4; and upon entering high school.
- Family literacy activities benefit the whole family. Reading ability is like a muscle - if you don't exercise it often, you may not be able to maintain the same level of reading ability as you age. Reinforcing reading and writing as a family activity benefits people of all ages. Setting aside time every day to read with your children, as well as independently, will help keep your mind sharp.



1,2,3,4,5,6 *Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey* (Statistics Canada and OECD, 2005); 7 *Family Literacy in Canada: Profiles of Effective Practices*, Adele Thomas (Soleil Publishing Inc., 1998); 8,9 *National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth*, (Statistics Canada, 1996-1997); 10 Family Literacy Foundation, 2001; 11,12 *How to Make Your Child a Reader for Life*, Paul Kropp (Random House Canada, 2000). © ABC Life Literacy Canada.