

WHAT CAN PARENTS AND WHĀNAU DO TO SUPPORT THE LEARNING OF THEIR TAMARIKI?

The most important way parents and whānau can support children's learning is to show them that they care about their learning. This means:

- providing lots of feedback and positive praise
- asking open-ended questions about their learning
- asking about how the child feels about the progress they are making and where they want to go next;
- being patient and realising that children make progress in fits and spurts, not usually in a linear fashion – don't expect perfection immediately!

Even if you don't feel that positive about your own school experience, you can still make a real difference to your child's learning. After all, maths, reading and writing are part of our lives, and learning about them happens all the time, not just at school. For example, we are born with our very own built-in decimal counting system – the 10 fingers on our hands! And many children recognise numbers and letters before they get to school, not because they have been "taught" but because there are letters and numbers in our daily environment – on letterboxes, car number plates, the back of buses and so on.

Here are a number of suggestions about what parents and whānau can do as part of your family's daily life....

For children aged 3-7

If your child is not yet at school, you can give them a great start in life by ensuring they take part in quality early childhood education. Children are active learners from birth, and their early learning experiences are vital to their success in school and in later life. Research has found that high quality ECE has a positive and long lasting impact - even at age 16, children's literacy, numeracy and problem solving abilities as well as their social skills still show benefits from their pre-school education.

Numeracy

- When you're cutting up fruit or pies – how many pieces are there? What is half/ quarter?
- Asking questions when you're putting on clothes – how many toes are going into your sock, how many arms into your jersey?
- Getting them to find "their" number (their age) on number plates, billboards, the back of buses
- On a wet day, get out the cards and play Snap, Go Fish, Last Card etc – great for number recognition

- Watching TV – what numbers are the channels/volume
- Check out websites like www.nzmaths.co.nz/families for on-line games
- Shopping and cafes – for real or make-believe – offer lots of opportunities to talk about prices, help draw up shopping lists, look for prices and letters and weight

Reading

- Tell stories – made up stories, imaginary stories, stories your parents told you... and encourage them to come up with their own stories that they can tell you. Give them an opening line - the more ridiculous the better! - and ask them to tell a story based on it. Or on long car journeys, make up silly stories as a family, with each passenger coming up with a new paragraph in the story.
- Reading books, comics, magazines to and with them. You don't need to be "choosy" about what to read – picture books on all and any subjects are great. If they are into superheros, then Captain Underpants or comics are fine. If they're into dinosaurs, try wildlife books, if they're into fairies, go with the flow...
- Go to your local library with them – choose the books YOU like to read as well as the ones they want! and ask the library staff for recommendations that are age-appropriate for your child.
- Getting them to find "their" letter (the first letter of their name) on billboards, on car number plates, or in newspapers.
- Ask them to work out words on their favourite foods in the supermarket.

Writing

- Make sure they get plenty of "big muscle" play outside – playing with balls, gym, swinging and so on. Without developing big muscle coordination, fine motor skills will be less well developed and make letter formation harder.
- Encourage drawing and painting – expressing their ideas visually first helps children sort out what they want to say
- Run your own home spelling bee – get the children to come up with their own list as well as the basic word lists they are learning at school (enhanced by rewards from grandparents or other family members if they get them all right)
- Encourage them to write or email their grandparents or friends in other places, even if it is just 1-2 lines.
- If you go on holiday, suggest they make a holiday scrapbook or journal where they can put in pamphlets and tickets from special places they've visited (Zoo, Splash Palace, museum, Kelly Tarlton's etc) and write something about their visit.

8-12 year olds

- Go to your local library with them – choose the books YOU like to read as well as the ones they want!
- Children love series and often develop "favourite" authors – so as they get older, get them into the first in a series like The Cherub (Robert Muchamore), Lion Boy (Zizou Corder) or Harry Potter (J.K. Rowling) and you'll have them hooked for several books.

- Ask the library staff for recommendations that are age-appropriate for your child.
- If you've got a library close to your school, suggest you meet your child at the library after school rather than at the school gates. Be 5 minutes late!

What you and your school can do together

- Suggest the school look at programmes like Reading Together , a programme of workshops that helps parents gain skills to support the development of their child's reading.
- Talk to your principal and your PTA/Home and School about running an impromptu crèche for younger/other children while you're attending the parent conferences, providing free food where possible!
- Your school may have literacy and numeracy evenings for new entrant parents to explain the strategies teachers use to teach reading and maths
- If you don't understand the education jargon used in school or classroom newsletters, ask for a "plain English" explanation. Like other groups, teachers have developed lots of educational jargon that makes sense to them but not necessarily to parents.
- Talk to your school about opportunities to show children's learning at hours that suit parents - before school at drop off or later in the day eg after 5pm
- Encourage the school to put children's learning up in other environments than school eg local library, supermarket etc
- If you've been at the school for a while, talk to your principal about how you can help "buddy" new parents
- If you've got a concern, don't wait until the next round of parent-student-teacher conferences – call or email your child's teacher and make a time to meet them to discuss the issue.
- If you can't make parent-teacher-student conferences on the dates suggested, ring or email your child's teacher and make a time that suits you both.