

Milestones Matter: A Guide for Families and Caregivers



Brighter
Futures
INDIANA

Why Literacy Milestones Matter

From birth to age five, a child's brain develops faster than at any other time in their life. Language and literacy skills grow through everyday moments like talking, singing, reading and playing.

Use this guide to track a child's literacy development, learn how to support them and know when to reach out for support. Remember, every child grows at their own pace. This is about progress, not perfection.

Birth to 12 Months

Your child might:

- Turn toward sounds or familiar voices
- Babble and coo
- Watch your face when you talk or sing
- Explore books by looking, grabbing or mouthing

How to help:

- Talk and sing during everyday routines
- Read simple board books together
- Respond to sounds with smiles and words

Check with your pediatrician if:

- Baby doesn't respond to sounds or vocalize by 6–9 months



1 to 2 Years

Your child might:

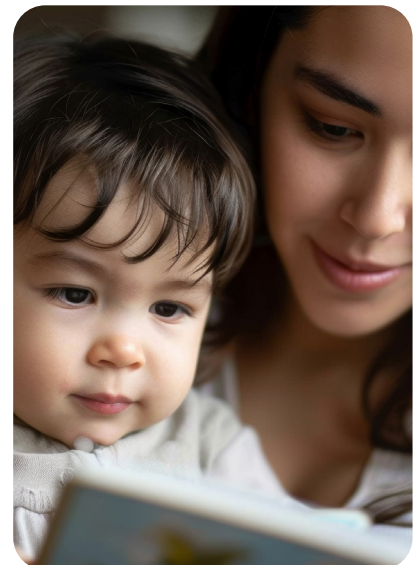
- Use simple words like “mama,” “ball” or “bye”
- Point to pictures when named
- Recognize and enjoy favorite books or songs

How to help:

- Talk often and name objects
- Ask questions while reading
- Encourage pointing, repeating and labeling

Check with your pediatrician if:

- Fewer than 10–20 words
- Little interest in communication or books



Milestones Matter: A Guide for Families and Caregivers



Brighter
Futures
INDIANA

Why Literacy Milestones Matter

2 to 3 Years

Your child might:

- Use short sentences like “want milk” or “go car”
- Retell parts of familiar stories
- Pretend to read from memory

How to help:

- Repeat and expand their speech
- Read together every day
- Play with letter sounds and rhymes

Check with your pediatrician if:

- Speech is hard to understand
- Struggles to combine words



3 to 4 Years

Your child might:

- Tell stories with beginning, middle, and end
- Recognize letters and understand rhymes
- Know print has meaning

How to help:

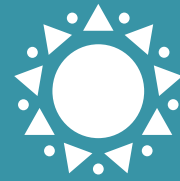
- Play letter games and rhyming songs
- Let them “read” and tell their own stories
- Encourage questions and curiosity

Check with your pediatrician if:

- Difficulty understanding or expressing ideas
- Little interest in books or letters



Milestones Matter: A Guide for Families and Caregivers



Brighter
Futures
INDIANA

Why Literacy Milestones Matter

4 to 5 Years

Your child might:

- Recognize many letters and sounds
- Write their name or letters
- Understand basic print concepts
- Retell full stories

How to help:

- Keep a daily reading routine
- Encourage writing and drawing
- Ask open-ended questions about stories

Check with your pediatrician if:

- Can't follow stories or express thoughts clearly
- Has trouble remembering letters or sounds



Need more support or a free developmental screening?



Scan the QR code or visit brighterfuturesindiana.org to connect with local resources and early learning experts.



Scan the QR code to explore [Indiana First Steps](#) for developmental services tailored to children under age 3.



Scan the QR code to watch [Sparks](#) free video series designed to help families find early (birth to 5) moments of connection and strengthen discussions with providers at each primary care visit.

