



Supporting early learners' literacy at home



Signs and symbols on the street

Early literacy begins with the awareness that there is communication going on around us all the time. There are messages to us about where and how we can walk on city and suburban streets. There are paths, fences and gates, roads and lanes, and letterboxes with numbers on them. There are country roads, bush tracks, walking track signage, street signs and shop signs.

The world of children is rich in signs and symbols, print and images, codes that are mysterious and codes that are meaningful.

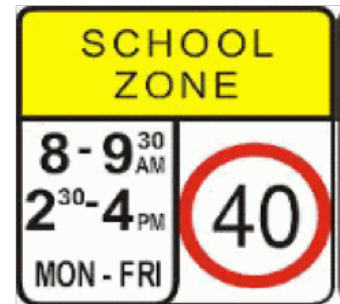
Our children quickly become aware that we are active partners in the literacy demands of these signs.

They also learn that we produce our own signs and symbols for others to interpret, use and respond to.

These are the beginnings of literacy. Being literate is not a passive activity. Our children can become involved in this literate world, and make meaning for themselves, from a very early age.

Here are some activities for when you are out and about.

1. Draw attention to road and traffic signs and what they tell drivers and pedestrians. You can keep up a running commentary on what you are doing as you drive around. It's called a 'think aloud' when we use it in the classroom. You are simply saying out loud what you are thinking while you are doing. Examples: 'Here's a stop sign, so I have to stop and wait for the other cars to go.' 'Good, we can go now.' 'We are going into a busy street, so the give way sign tells me I will have to wait.' 'The sign says this is a school zone, so I have to drive very carefully. I'll make sure I don't go faster than 40 kph.' It's probably better to do the running commentary when there is just you and the children in the car.
2. Talk about the shapes – the stop sign octagon, the give way triangle, and the school zone rectangle.



Images: <https://www.driverknowledgetests.com/road-sign-information/> accessed 7 Sept 2018

3. Talk about the colours of the signs. The use of red signals a level of risk or danger. Children can make their own traffic signals from cardboard and paddle-pop sticks stuck into play-dough on their car tracks at home. They can invent their own codes and symbols.
4. Street signs, house and apartment numbers and letterboxes are a source of literacy and numeracy activities. Talk about the streets you have to drive or walk along to get to your destination. Point out the names of streets as you make your way. Use sentences like, 'We have to turn down Smith Street and we'll stop and Number 23.' Searching for house, shop and apartment numbers is often a bit of a challenge. Take the time to do it properly, if



possible. And model the perfectly acceptable behaviour of asking directions. On walking tracks, use the signage provided to inform the walk – distance, estimated length of time, level of difficulty. Refer to guides and information leaflets to show that their information is important.

5. Shop and building signs can be extremely helpful as you find your way to your destination. These are often confusing when bundled together inside a mall or shopping centre. So reduce confusion by focusing on the ones of significance to you for that trip, and by walking along streets and paths with fewer distractions. Point out the recognisable symbols, and signs such as opening hours, sales and specials. You can also point out landmarks such as the Police station, the court house, the station.

These signs and symbols around us are texts. As described in the Australian Curriculum:

Texts provide the means for communication. They can be written, spoken, visual, multimodal, and in print or digital/online forms.

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/literacy/> accessed 25 Aug 2018

Talk builds the child's knowledge of the meaning of many of the texts – the means for communication - around us, their importance, and the need for action or response from the person reading the signs. When children are old enough to make use of these signs themselves, they will already know their purpose, their significance, and many of their language features.

They will understand that they are participants in this meaning-making game of literacy too.