



Parents' Views on Literacy Development

A brief poll

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This report outlines research that was conducted in February 2012 at the launch of the National Literacy Trust's Words for Life campaign that encourages parents to support their children's communication and literacy development and gives them the confidence to feel they can make a positive difference. The campaign was set up as it is parents who have the greatest influence over how their children develop literacy skills. It is primarily aimed at parents of children aged from birth to eleven from disadvantaged communities.

Learning at home has the biggest influence on the achievement of children and is a far more accurate predictor of a child's success than the family's income. However, as this report will show, parents are not always aware of how important they are in helping their children develop communication and language skills and a sizeable proportion of parents do not spend time on a daily basis supporting their children's literacy development, for example by singing nursery rhymes or reading with them.

The poll

The research was conducted by One Poll on behalf of the National Literacy Trust from 9 -14 February 2012. One Poll surveyed 1,000 parents of 0 to 16-year-olds in the C2DE social bracket, which refers to the lowest three social and economic groups.

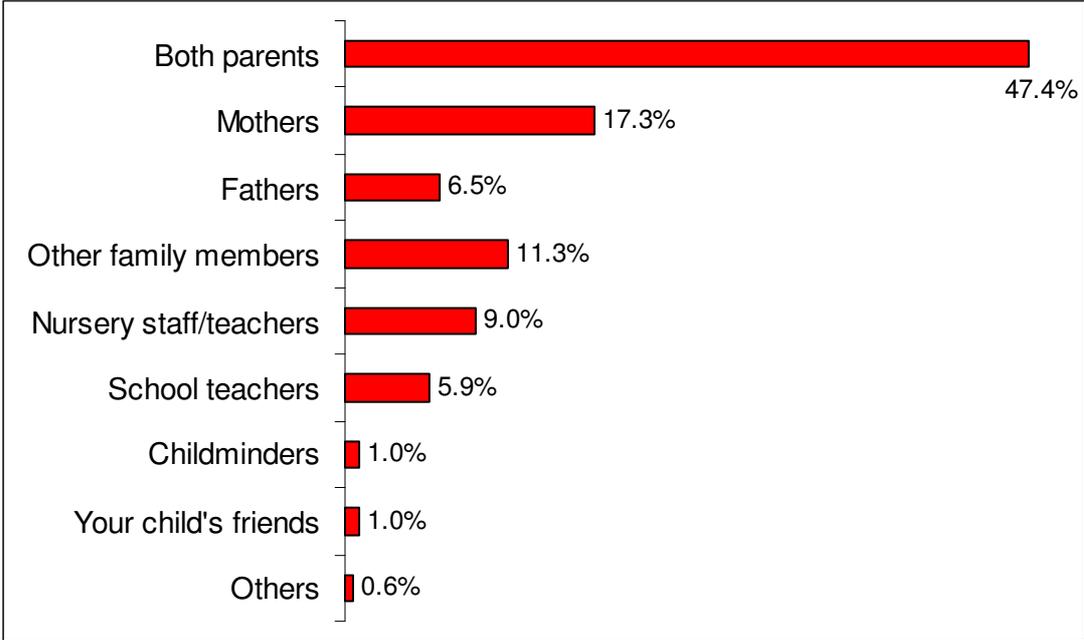
Findings

Level of parental awareness of their importance in supporting communication and literacy

When asked who they think has the most important influence on their child to help them develop communication and literacy skills (the ability to read, write, speak and listen effectively), most parents felt that they as parents were the most important influence on their child's communication and language skills (see **Figure 1**).

However, nearly a third of the parents we surveyed (29%) felt the most important influence on their child's communication skills development lay with someone else, with 15% citing teachers (combining school teachers and nursery staff/teachers) as having the greatest influence.

Figure 1: Who has the most important influence on their child’s communication and language skills



As many mothers as fathers believe that both parents have the most important influence on their child’s communication and language skills (47.7% and 47%, respectively; see **Table 1**). However, more fathers than mothers believed that people other than family have the most important influence, with 18.2% of fathers compared to 12.3% of mothers believing that nursery staff/teachers and teachers are the most influential when it comes to their child’s communication and language skills.

The majority of respondents believe that parents have the most important influence irrespective of their age (for more detailed information see **Table 1**). However, young parents (aged 18 to 24) are more likely than older parents to believe that non-family members are the most influential: 22.9% of 18 to 24-year-olds say that nursery staff/teachers and school teachers are the most important influence on their child’s skills compared with, 14.3% of 25 to 34-year-olds. Similarly, parents aged 18 to 24 are three times more likely to believe that childminders have the most important language influence compared with parents from the older age groups.

Table 1: Who do you think has the most important influence on your child to help them develop communication and literacy skills (the ability to read, write, speak and listen effectively)

	Female (N = 566) %	Male (N = 434) %	Aged 18-24 (N = 131) %	Aged 25-34 (N = 387) %	Aged 35-44 (N = 299) %	Aged 45-54 (N = 128) %	Aged 55+ (N = 55) %
Both parents	47.7	47.0	35.1	48.1	51.8	44.5	54.6
Mothers	17.7	16.8	12.9	17.1	17.1	21.1	21.8
Fathers	6.0	7.1	6.1	6.7	5.0	10.9	3.6
Other family members	13.4	8.5	16.8	11.9	10.0	9.4	5.5
Nursery staff or teachers	5.8	13.1	12.9	9.6	8.4	5.5	7.3
School teachers	6.5	5.0	9.9	4.7	5.7	7.0	3.6

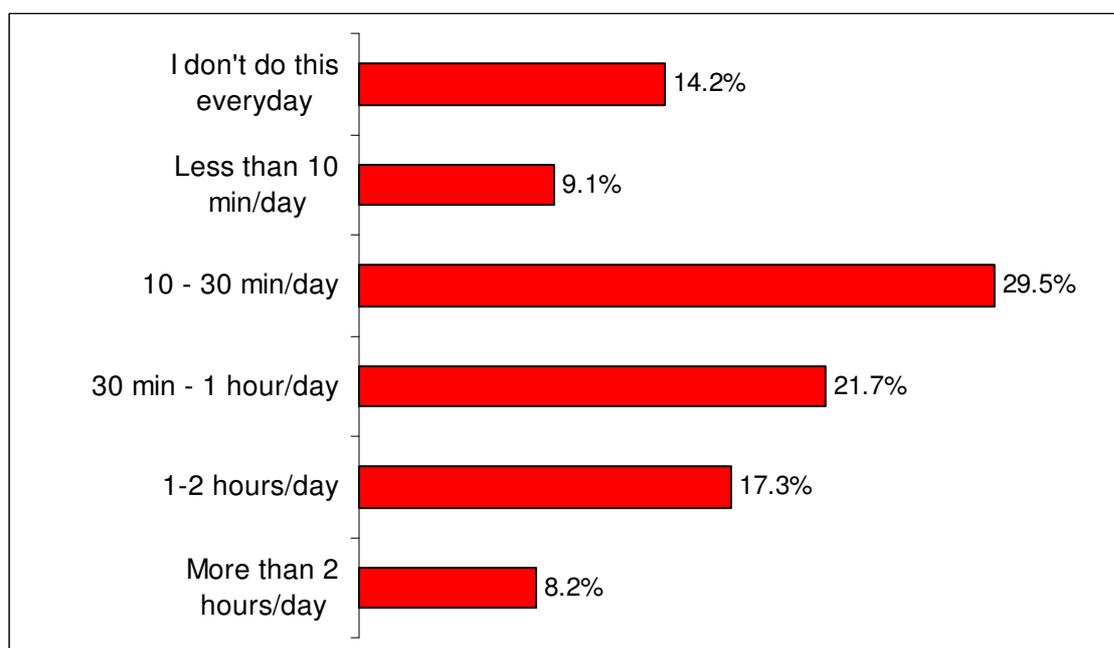
	Female (N = 566) %	Male (N = 434) %	Aged 18-24 (N = 131) %	Aged 25-34 (N = 387) %	Aged 35-44 (N = 299) %	Aged 45-54 (N = 128) %	Aged 55+ (N = 55) %
Both parents	47.7	47.0	35.1	48.1	51.8	44.5	54.6
Childminders	1.1	0.9	3.1	0.8	0.3	0.8	1.8
Your child's friends	1.1	0.9	1.5	0.8	1.0	0.8	1.8

Time spent supporting their child's communication and language skills on a daily basis

How much time do parents spend helping their child develop literacy and communication skills, for example by reading a book to their child, telling nursery rhymes to their baby or discussing school work with their child?

While research shows how important parental input is for children to develop good literacy skills, (Desforges 2007) parents are not always aware of how vital their role is. **Figure 2** shows that 14% of parents do not spend any time at all on a daily basis helping their children develop literacy and communication skills, for example by telling nursery rhymes to their baby, reading with their children or discussing school work. And nearly one parent in ten (9.1%) spends less than 10 minutes a day on these activities.

Figure 2: Time parents spend daily to help their child develop literacy and communication skills



More fathers (17%) than mothers (12%) say that they don't help their children everyday (for more information see **Table 2**). However, it is not the case that fathers are always less involved than mothers on a daily basis. For example, while nearly twice as many mothers than fathers said they help their child for more than two hours a day (10.3% vs. 5.5%), more fathers than mothers said they help their child for one to two hours a day (20.5% vs. 14.8%).

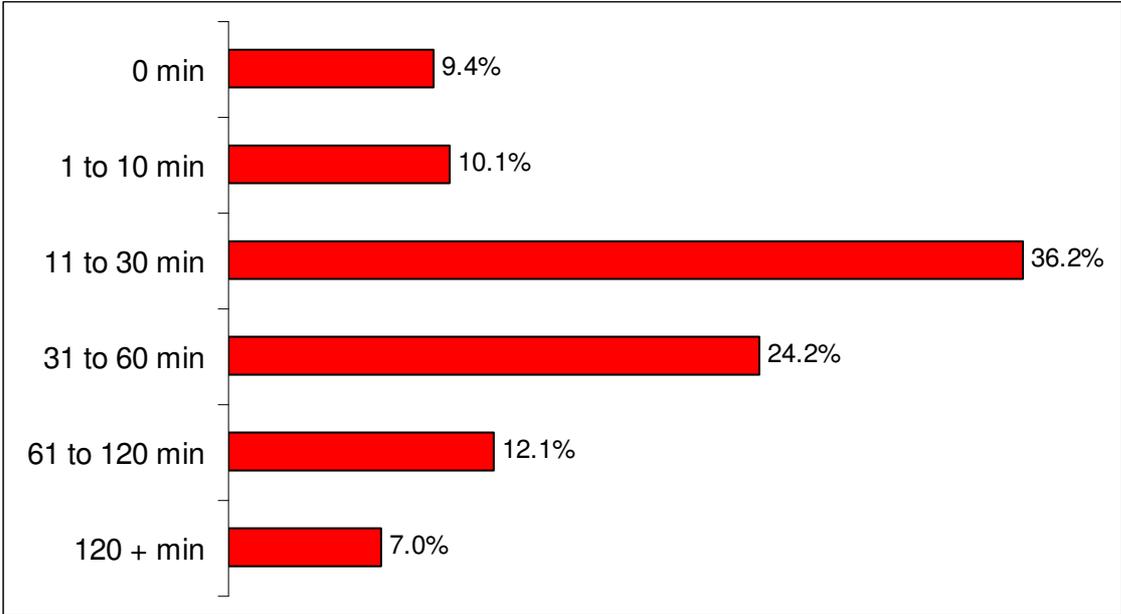
Table 2 also shows that young parents (aged 18-24) spend more time daily helping their child to develop literacy and communication skills than older parents (aged 45+).

Table 2: How much time do you spend helping your child develop literacy and communication skills, for example by reading a book to your child, telling nursery rhymes to your baby or discussing school work with your child.

	Female (N = 566) %	Male (N = 434) %	Aged 18-24 (N = 131) %	Aged 25-34 (N = 387) %	Aged 35-44 (N = 299) %	Aged 45-54 (N = 128) %	Aged 55+ (N = 55) %
Don't do it everyday	12.0	17.1	8.4	15.3	12.4	19.5	18.2
Less than 10 min/day	11.1	6.5	6.9	8.5	10.0	11.7	7.3
10 -30 min/day	28.5	30.9	24.4	26.4	33.1	33.6	34.6
30 min – 1 hour/day	23.3	19.6	28.2	22.2	20.4	16.4	21.8
1 – 2 hours/day	14.8	20.5	16.0	20.2	16.7	13.3	12.7
More than 2 hours/day	10.3	5.5	16.0	7.5	7.4	5.5	5.5

When asked how many more minutes per day they ideally would like to spend helping their child develop literacy and communication skills, most parents (91%) said that they would like to spend more time supporting their children (see **Figure 3**). On average, parents would like to spend 38 additional minutes a day supporting their child’s communication and language skills.

Figure 3: Additional time parents would like to spend supporting their child’s communication and language skills



On average, fathers would like to spend more minutes a day supporting their child’s communication and language skills than mothers (40.3 min vs 37.6 min; for a more detailed breakdown by gender please see **Table 3**).

Although young parents (18-24) already spend the longest time in a day supporting their children in their communication and language skills, they are also one of the two age groups that would, on average, like to spend more time doing this. More specifically, 18 to 24-year-olds would like to spend 44.5 additional minutes a day supporting their child, while those aged 55+ would like to spend on average another 45 minutes supporting their child. This compares to an

average of 37.3 minutes for 25 to 34-year-olds, 38.9 minutes for 35 to 44-year-olds and 34.7 minutes for 45 to 54-year-olds. For a more detailed breakdown by gender please see **Table 3**.

Table 3. How many more minutes per day would you ideally like to spend with your child, helping them develop literacy and communication skills?

	Female (N = 566) %	Male (N = 434) %	Aged 18-24 (N = 131) %	Aged 25-34 (N = 387) %	Aged 35-44 (N = 299) %	Aged 45-54 (N = 128) %	Aged 55+ (N = 55) %
0 min	8.5	10.6	3.0	12.1	7.4	13.3	7.3
1 – 10 min	10.6	9.5	9.9	9.8	10.7	11.7	5.5
11 – 30 min	25.9	36.6	35.9	36.4	37.1	35.9	30.9
31 – 60 min	28.8	20.5	26.0	22.7	26.8	23.4	36.4
61 – 120 min	10.0	14.8	18.3	12.7	10.7	9.4	7.3
120 min +	6.2	8.0	6.9	6.2	7.4	6.3	12.7

‘Words for life’

Parents were also asked what advice or ‘words for life’ they would want to pass on to their children and the most popular phrase was ‘*when one door closes, another door opens*’. Other popular sayings included:

1. Do as you would be done by
2. Laugh and the world laughs with you, cry and you cry alone
3. Never go to sleep on an argument
4. If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again
5. A little of what you fancy does you good
6. Time heals all wounds
7. Whatever you are, be a good one
8. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush
9. Don’t look a gift horse in the mouth

Implications for parents

The survey revealed that a third of parents don’t realise they have the most important influence on their child’s language and literacy development.

The *Words for Life* campaign and website encourages parents to build support for their young child’s language and literacy development into their daily routine. www.wordsforlife.org.uk has developmental milestones, tips and fun activities for parents to do with their children to help them develop vital communication skills.

Words for Life is designed to raise awareness amongst parents of the significant and very positive role they can play in developing their child’s literacy and communication skills. Our message is that spending time helping your children to develop these skills can easily be fitted into everyday life; it’s not about carving out great swathes of time every day, it’s about finding small moments to talk, share and have fun with your child.

Helping your child develop their communication skills can and should be incorporated into everyday family life – chatting while you have breakfast together, singing and talking together at bath time, listening to your child read a book, looking at road signs together on the walk to school, spotting bus numbers, reading a book at bedtime, playing simple word and number games and talking about what you can see while you're doing the weekly grocery shop.

So what can parents do to help their child?

There are a vast number of things that parents can do with their child every day to help them develop their literacy and communication skills. Often these can be built into the routines of daily life and so don't need to take up great chunks of time.

There are lots of ideas and suggestions for things that parents and children can do together on www.wordsforlife.org.uk, for example:

- Singing songs and rhymes
- Listening to your baby and responding as they make their attempts at speech
- Listening to your child read a school book or a favourite book from home
- Get them drawing and painting and they will be practising the skills they will need for writing
- Playing word games – i-spy is a great one to start with
- Talking about your child's day at school – if they are reluctant to tell you try making it into a guessing game
- Reading the ingredients on the cereal packet at breakfast time
- Taking a trip to the supermarket – looking at the food labels, signs on the shelves and listening out for announcements
- Spotting road signs and bus numbers on the way to school

These will help children develop strong communication skills that they will then be armed with for life.

About the National Literacy Trust

We are the only national charity dedicated to raising literacy levels in the UK. Our research and analysis make us the leading authority on literacy. We run projects in the poorest communities, campaign to make literacy a priority for politicians and parents, and support schools.

Visit www.literacytrust.org.uk to find out more, donate or sign up for a free email newsletter. You can also find us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter..

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Words for life

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