

# Shoot for the SSTaRS!

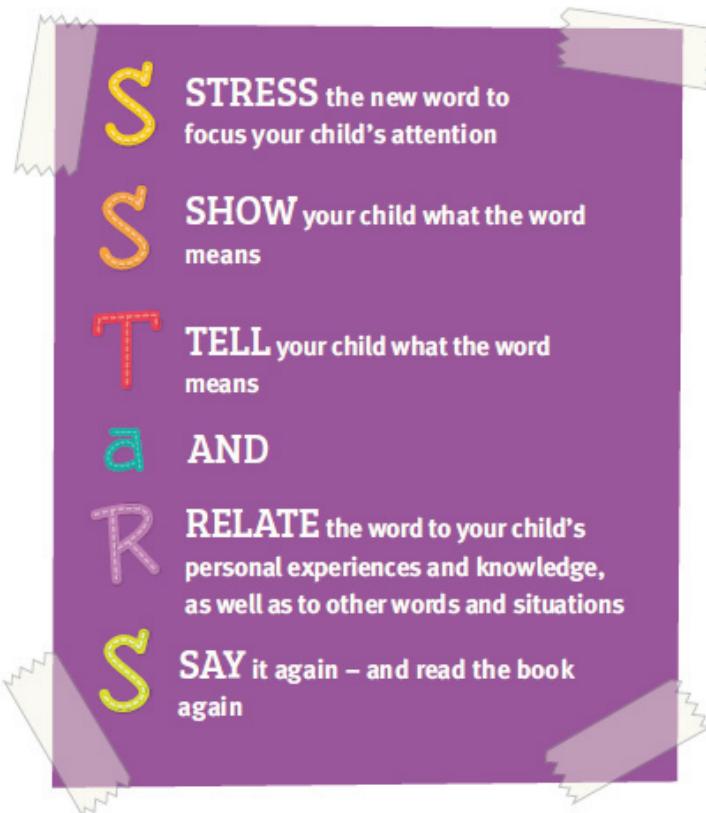
To be ready for success in school, young children need to have a strong foundation of **early literacy skills** – the skills required before a child starts to read or write. Studies have shown that children who start school with higher levels of these skills go on to have greater academic success.

Building your child's early literacy skills can be both easy and fun when you know what to do. With a few simple strategies, you can make literacy-learning a natural and enjoyable part of the everyday routines and activities you're already doing with your child.

## Vocabulary – A Key Building Block of Literacy

One of the important early literacy skills your child needs to be prepared for school is **vocabulary**. The larger a child's vocabulary in preschool, the easier it will be for her to read and understand stories later on.

But it isn't just about how many words your child knows. How well she *understands* those words is important as well. To build your child's understanding of new words, you'll need to "Shoot for the SSTaRS".



## Stress

To stress a word, pause for a moment before and after the word. Also, emphasize the word by using a louder or quieter voice when you say it. For example, “He was feeling... *exhausted*... after all that running.”

## Show... and Tell

Show your child what the word means by:

- Pointing to pictures in the book.
- Using facial expressions.
- Using actions or gestures (for example, slump your shoulders when saying “exhausted”)

## Tell

Tell your child what the word means by:

- Explaining its meaning. For example, “He’s *selfish*. ‘Selfish’ means that he only cares about what *he* wants, and not about what other people want.”
- Talking about the category the word belongs to. For example, “an eggplant is a vegetable.”
- Describing what the word is and what it’s not. For example, “A passenger is someone who rides in a bus, a car, a train or a plane. But a passenger can’t be a driver.”

## And

## Relate

Relate the word to familiar words or experiences.

- Words – Describe the word using simpler words your child already knows. For example, when talking about the word *exhausted*, use more familiar words like “tired” or “sleepy”.
- Experiences – If you come across the word “exhausted” in a book, remind your child of the time the two of you were *exhausted* after running to catch a bus.

## Say

Say it again – The more times your child hears a word, the more likely she’ll be to understand and remember it. Repeat the word by:

- Reading the same book several times.
- Using the word in different situations throughout the day.
- Using the word before or during book reading (e.g. while looking at a picture) or after book reading while having a conversation about the story.

# Example of Shooting for the SSTA<sub>RS</sub> with “pedestrian”

## Stress

**Pause before and after the word, and draw attention to it by using a louder or quieter voice**

“Looking out the school bus window, she could see many... *pedestrians*... on the sidewalk.”

## Show

**Point to a picture** Point to a picture of a pedestrian in the book.

**Act it out** Pretend you’re walking down a street like a pedestrian.

## Tell

**Name the category or define the word** “A *pedestrian* is a person who gets from one place to another by walking.”

**Use familiar Step 1 words** “This woman is a *pedestrian*. She is walking on the sidewalk.”

**Provide details** “Most streets have sidewalks just for *pedestrians* so they’re safely away from the cars and trucks.”

**Talk about what the word is and what it is not** “A *pedestrian* is someone who is walking on the sidewalk, but not someone who is driving or riding a bike on the road.”

## and Relate

**Relate the word to your child’s experiences or knowledge** “When we walked to the grocery store yesterday, we were *pedestrians*. Can you think of another time that you were a pedestrian?”

**Talk about other situations in which the word could be used** “Sometimes a bridge is built only for people to walk on, not for cars. This kind of bridge can be called a *pedestrian* bridge.”

## Say it again

**Use the word before, during and after the book reading** *Before the reading* tell your child you are going to read a book about a pedestrian – “That means a person who is walking on the sidewalk.”

*During the reading* talk more about the meaning of the word “pedestrian” as it comes up in the book.

*After the reading* use the word again as you relate it to your child’s experiences. For example, talk about the crosswalk for pedestrians that’s in front of your child’s school.

**Read the book again** Give your child the chance to contribute more and more to the conversation as she becomes familiar with the word “pedestrian.”

**Use the word again throughout the day** When out for a walk, talk about being a pedestrian and point out other pedestrians. Talk about the rules that you must follow as pedestrians.

# What other early literacy skills does your child need to learn?



**Conversation** - A child's ability to use and understand speech is directly related to her literacy development. The better her conversational skills now, the easier it will be for her to understand what she reads later on.



**Vocabulary** - The more words a child knows, the easier it is for her to learn new words and to gain meaning from the stories she reads.



**Story comprehension** - Experience listening to and understanding stories will eventually make it easier for a child to read and write stories on her own.



**Print knowledge** - Before a child can read and write, she must understand how print works. For example, she'll need to know that print is made up of letters of the alphabet, that letters combine to make words and that print is read from left to right.



**Sound awareness** - To be prepared to read, children must understand that words can be broken down into syllables and smaller sounds, and that letters correspond to certain sounds.

To learn more about what you can do to build these critical skills, visit [www.hanen.org/Getting-Ready-To-Read](http://www.hanen.org/Getting-Ready-To-Read)

Founded in 1975, The Hanen Centre is a Canadian not-for-profit charitable organization with a global reach. Its mission is to provide parents, caregivers, early childhood educators and speech-language pathologists with the knowledge and training they need to help young children develop the best possible language, social and literacy skills. This includes children who have or are at risk for language delays, those with developmental challenges such as autism, and those who are developing typically. For more information on The Hanen Centre and its programs and resources, visit [www.hanen.org](http://www.hanen.org).