

Module: **Communication and Emergent Literacy:
Early Intervention Issues**

Module Overview

Emergent literacy is a developmental process that begins at birth whereby children acquire the skills and knowledge that are the foundation for later reading and writing. For infants and toddlers, thought and language develop concurrently. Communication and language provide the foundation for literacy--the ability to read, write, and otherwise communicate with, or comprehend, written language. Literacy develops from children's oral language and their early attempts at reading (usually based on pictures) and writing (at first, scribbling).

Although most definitions of emergent literacy acknowledge that it begins very early in life, little is known about the development of emergent literacy in infants and toddlers, with or without disabilities. We do know, however, that preschool and school-aged children with disabilities often experience fewer literacy opportunities. We also know that families play a primary role in providing emergent literacy opportunities.

Because there is minimal literature or knowledge to guide emergent literacy recommendations for infants and toddlers with disabilities, we have reviewed the literature that is available for preschool-aged children and children with disabilities. We have used that information, along with recommended, developmentally appropriate, and evidence-based practices for young children with disabilities as the basis for this module. In addition, family-centered practices are an integral feature of this module, because family involvement is the key to effective early intervention. The content of this module has been peer reviewed by university faculty and practitioners throughout the United States and field tested at three universities.

The module begins with an overview of communication, language, and literacy and the potential impact of visual impairments on their development. Two sessions are devoted to describing early communication and language development, facilitating development in this domain, and providing suggestions and strategies for interventions to address the unique needs of children with visual impairments. The fourth session describes emergent literacy and the potential impact of visual impairments on emergent literacy, while the fifth session provides suggestions and strategies for facilitating emergent literacy.

Session Titles and Authors

Session 1: Overview of Communication and Literacy

Deborah D. Hatton, Ph.D. and Wendy K. Sapp, Ph.D.

Session 2: Communication Development and the Impact of Visual Impairments

Wendy K. Sapp, Ph.D., and Deborah D. Hatton, Ph.D.

Session 3: Communication and Language Interventions

Wendy K. Sapp, Ph.D., Jeanne L. Murphy, M.A., and Deborah D. Hatton, Ph.D.

Session 4: What Is Emergent Literacy?

Deborah D. Hatton, Ph.D. and Wendy K. Sapp, Ph.D.

Session 5: Interventions to Facilitate Emergent Literacy

Deborah D. Hatton, Ph.D. and Wendy K. Sapp, Ph.D.

Session Objectives

Session 1: Overview of Communication and Literacy

Communication is an important developmental milestone for infants and young children and is integrally related to literacy development. Literacy includes reading and writing; and without communication and literacy, children are severely limited in their ability to interact meaningfully with other people. In some children, visual impairments present unique and significant challenges to the development of communication and literacy. The purpose of this session is to define *communication*, *literacy*, and other basic terms, and to discuss the potential impact of visual impairments on communication and literacy development.

After completing this session, participants will

1. define receptive and expressive communication, nonlinguistic and prelinguistic communication, and emergent literacy.
2. describe the relationship of nonlinguistic/prelinguistic communication to social development and language development.
3. describe the concepts of literacy and emergent literacy.
4. discuss the concurrent and interrelated development of communication and literacy.
5. describe the three contexts—communicative, situational, and sociocultural—in which communication and literacy develop.
6. describe how early attachment between children with visual impairments and their caregivers might impact social-emotional and communication development.

7. describe why children must develop concepts about the world in order to develop communication and literacy skills, and why children with visual impairments are often delayed in their development of concepts.
8. recognize that children with visual impairments may not have incidental exposure to literacy events such as opportunities to observe use of print or braille in daily activities, and that they may not have access to appropriate and accessible literacy resources such as braille books and braille writers.
9. describe the potential impact of multiple disabilities on communication and emergent literacy development.
10. describe the role of teachers of children with visual impairments in planning and implementing family-centered, collaborative interventions that promote communication development and emergent literacy in infants and toddlers with visual impairments.

Session 2: Communication Development and the Impact of Visual Impairments

Communication skills are essential for children to be able to interact with other people. Visual impairments may directly affect communication by altering the ways in which children communicate, and indirectly through possible delays in other areas of development that are important for communication. The purpose of this session is to provide basic knowledge and skills about typical communication development and the impact of visual impairments on communication development.

After completing this session, participants will

1. describe seven levels of communicative competence.
2. describe the development of communication and language in typically developing children from birth through 36 months.
3. define *language* and describe five elements of language.
4. explain the importance of caregiver responsiveness in caregiver-child attachment and communication.
5. describe the importance of concept development for communication and why children with visual impairments may develop concepts differently.
6. describe six modes of nonlinguistic/prelinguistic communication, and explain how visual impairments may prevent children from engaging in typical nonlinguistic/prelinguistic communicative behaviors.
7. describe the potential impact of visual impairments on nonlinguistic/prelinguistic communication, including the development of idiosyncratic communicative behaviors of children with visual impairments and additional disabilities.
8. describe the potential impact of visual impairments, with and without additional disabilities, on language development.

Session 3: Communication and Language Interventions

Communication and language are the foundation for emergent literacy. Because visual impairments may impact communication and language development, early interventionists and teachers of children with visual impairments (TVIs) must work collaboratively with families and other team members to facilitate communication and language in infants and toddlers with visual impairments.

After completing this session, participants will

1. define communication *form* and *function*.
2. describe recommended practices for facilitating early communication and language development.
3. describe the relationship between secure attachment and early communication, and strategies for facilitating attachment and early communication—contingent responsivity, turn taking, providing choices, following the child’s lead.
4. discuss the importance of concept development for early communication of children with visual impairments and strategies for facilitating concept development in infants and toddlers with visual impairments.
5. describe evidence-based strategies for communication and language intervention.
6. describe strategies for facilitating early communication and language development in infants and toddlers as they move through the seven levels of communicative competence and acquire symbolic communication.
7. explain why some children with visual impairments may develop atypical communication and describe strategies for facilitating communication and for addressing echolalia, pronoun confusion, overuse of questions, and perseveration.
8. define alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) and assistive technology and describe strategies to facilitate communication in individuals who may benefit from AAC.
9. describe the relationship of communication and language to emergent literacy and literacy—that reading, writing, speaking (augmented communication), and listening develop concurrently and interrelatedly.
10. describe strategies and interventions that promote communication, language, emergent literacy (narrative knowledge, vocabulary, listening comprehension), and metalinguistic development (phonological awareness, syntactic awareness).

Session 4: What Is Emergent Literacy?

Emergent literacy is the developmental process that begins at birth whereby children acquire the foundation for reading and writing or literacy. Both emergent literacy and literacy evolve from complex interactions involving reading, writing, speaking, and listening and associated attitudes, expectations, and beliefs. The development of emergent literacy begins at birth as communication and language develop within social

interactions and continues through every day exposure to literacy activities. Children with disabilities, and particularly children with severe visual impairments and/or multiple disabilities, often have fewer opportunities to acquire emergent literacy skills that are related to later success in reading and writing.

After completing this session, participants will

1. define emergent literacy as the developmental process that begins at birth whereby children acquire the foundation for reading and writing.
2. describe two important models of emergent literacy.
3. identify six key components of emergent literacy: oral language, phonological awareness, concept development, knowledge of the conventions of print/braille and of print/braille intentionality, alphabetic knowledge, and environmental factors.
4. define oral language, including listening comprehension, vocabulary, and narrative knowledge, and describe how it is related to emergent literacy and literacy.
5. define phonological awareness, including phonemic awareness, as a metalinguistic process that contributes to emergent literacy and literacy.
6. discuss concept development, including the formation of schemas, and how it relates to emergent literacy.
7. describe knowledge of the conventions of print/braille and print/braille intentionality and their relationship to literacy.
8. define alphabetic knowledge and describe its contribution to literacy.
9. describe the relationship between environmental factors, including the communicative, situational, and sociocultural contexts within which literacy develops, and literacy.
10. describe effective early intervention practices for facilitating emergent literacy as collaborative and family-centered, developmentally appropriate, and based on evidence-based and recommended practices to achieve functional outcomes within naturally occurring learning opportunities.
11. describe strategies and interventions to facilitate emergent literacy—play, routines-based literacy, responsive literacy environments, shared storybook reading (especially dialogic reading, storybook preview, and storybook sounds), storytelling, and dialogue and how they facilitate the development of six key components of emergent literacy.
12. describe assessments that can be used to identify, plan, and implement emergent literacy interventions.
13. discuss the potential impact of visual impairments on emergent literacy, the challenge of determining whether children will be print or braille readers, and considerations for providing appropriate adaptations that will facilitate emergent literacy in these children.

Session 5: Interventions to Facilitate Emergent Literacy

Because emergent literacy provides the foundation for literacy and because literacy is essential for independence and employment, it is an important functional goal for young children with disabilities. In addition, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA, 2004) requires preliteracy goals that are

developmentally appropriate and evidence based. Families play a key role in providing emergent literacy experiences for their children within natural learning opportunities. Early interventionists can support families in providing emergent literacy experiences that meet the unique needs of children with disabilities.

After completing this session, participants will

1. define emergent literacy and identify the components of emergent literacy: oral language, phonological awareness, concept development; knowledge of the conventions of print/braille and of print/braille intentionality, alphabetic knowledge, and environmental factors.
2. describe recommended early intervention practices for facilitating emergent literacy as collaborative and family centered, developmentally appropriate, and evidence based to achieve functional outcomes within naturally occurring learning opportunities.
3. describe the importance of families and caregiving environments in promoting emergent literacy.
4. discuss the potential impact of visual impairment on emergent literacy and strategies for facilitating emergent literacy in children with visual impairments.
5. describe strategies for promoting emergent literacy in children with visual impairments and additional disabilities, including those who use alternative and augmentative communication systems.
6. discuss emergent literacy interventions including play; routines-based literacy; responsive literacy environments; shared storybook reading, especially dialogic reading, storybook preview, and storybook sounds; storytelling; and dialogue.