

The Impact of Illiteracy Young Children

According to a recent study by the U.S. Department of Education, 32 million American adults are illiterate, 21% read below a 5th grade level and 19% of high school graduates are functionally illiterate, meaning they cannot read well enough to manage and perform daily living tasks. This can be avoided when people are aware of these statistics and what lack of literacy skills can cause.

When children do not learn to read and write effectively, it affects them and their families. The psychological effect impacts their progress during their early school years. It can also make math and science just as difficult. About 80% of a child's brain is developed by age 3 and a key period of development occurs in their language and literacy skills. The quality of early childhood education can be determined by one's economic status. Half of all children by age 5 living in poverty are not academically or socially ready for school, studies have shown (Center on Children and Families at Brookings). Poverty is a risk factor for illiteracy. By fourth grade, 80% of low-income children read at below grade level. Falling behind during critical years will also affect social skills, health and economic status later in their lives. Low literacy often impacts a person's health, preventative healthcare actions and taking medications correctly as well as impacting them psychologically. Shame, fear, low self-confidence, low self-esteem are all impacted by how well a person can effectively communicate and read and educate themselves. All these things can have a negative impact on society in general. These things can be avoided.

The American Academy of Pediatrics created a toolkit in 2014 that gives health care providers and doctors resources to speak to parents about how important literacy is. Parents reading to children is so important and enjoyable. The toolkit also teaches parents to read, talk and even sing with their children. All of these interactions will improve literacy but also have an effect on social skills, bonding, self-esteem and more. Children whose parents have low literacy skills have a 72% chance of having low reading levels themselves.

People that have low literacy skills have a harder time finding work. There is a large financial-earning gap between adults with low literacy skills and those with higher literacy skills. Lower literate adults are much more likely to receive public financial aid and earn less. A lot of these individuals have never used a computer or even have a high school diploma. Employers are less likely to hire someone who has not finished high school or has a GED. Making literacy a priority starting with young children will help them as well as society in many ways.

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