

Helping Young Children Learn to Read

What Parents Can Do

Reading is one of the basic building blocks for your child's learning and school success. It is a skill on which most other learning is built. Children who become good readers when they are young are more likely to become better learners throughout their school years and beyond.

The basic skills necessary for your child to become a good reader are acquired before your child ever starts school. For example, children become stronger readers if they start with a foundation of solid language and vocabulary skills. Since parents are their child's first teacher, you can help teach them many skills related to later reading ability early in their life. But remember not to push too hard. Learning how to read doesn't happen quickly -- it takes years. Be patient. It is very important that you make learning how to read fun – not work.



There are many things parents can do to prepare children to become good readers. The information on the following pages offers specific suggestions for what you can do to help your child start down the path of becoming a good reader.

Help your toddler and preschool-aged child develop strong language skills

Children start on the road to becoming readers as infants listening to your voice. This is how they first learn about language. Language skills provide the foundation for learning how to reading. The first step in helping your child to become a good reader is to focus on verbal/language stimulation.

- ***Talk to your child...a lot.*** Children learn words more easily and build their vocabulary when they hear them often. A research study found that in the course of daily interactions young children from high-income families heard over three times as many words per hour than children from low-income families.
- ***Teach your child new words.*** Help your child learn that different words start with the same sounds.
- ***Tell stories.*** Children love it when you make up stories that involve them. “Once upon a time, there was a little boy named _____. One day he went to ...” As children your child gets older he can help you build stories. Start a story and then ask your child what comes next. This kind of dialogue fosters exploration with language and encourages creative thinking. Example: “There was a cat walking along the road...” Ask your child “What happens next?” Allow your child to explore options.

- **Sing songs together.** You can sing songs while you are doing chores such as folding laundry or cooking.
- **Label and talk about things in pictures.** Make up stories about pictures. Have your child make up stories from pictures. Encourage the use of descriptive and comparison words.
- **Talk aloud about what you are doing in your daily routines and life.** Explain what you are doing and why. Use daily chores such as preparing meals as times to help your child learn language. For example, you could say out loud: “I’m putting chocolate syrup into the milk. Now I’m stirring it to mix it altogether.” Read recipes out loud - “now the recipe says to add a cup of flour.” Then have your child add the flour.
- **Talk about how things can change.** For example, when toasting bread show your child that it is “harder,” “darker”, and “hotter” when it comes out of the toaster.
- **Label things.** For example, label the foods you buy at the grocery store as you take them out of the grocery bag. As your child learns the names of food ask your child to name the food as you take it out of the bag. In the bathroom use the mirror to help your child learn the name of body parts and things she can do such as wink.
- **Play word games.** “I spy with my little eye something that is (red).” Let’s name things that are (green). I’m thinking of (something you would find in a park)
- **Help your child understand words related to position, direction, size and comparison.** For example, teach children the concepts of: “Like” and “Different;” “Top” and “Bottom;” “First” and “Last;” “Big” and “Little;” “Up” and “Down.”
- **Help your child become aware of rhyming words** (through songs, nursery rhymes, poems, books with rhyming patterns such as Dr. Seuss books). Help your child learn that some words rhyme. This helps children learn about the sounds in words. Teach your child nursery rhymes such as “Hey Diddle, Diddle, The Cat and the Fiddle” etc. There is a direct relationship between the number of rhyming words a child knows when entering kindergarten and later reading success.



Read to your child

Reading to children is the single most powerful thing parents can do at home to help their child become good readers.

- **Read aloud to your child every day.** Make it part of your daily routine. Good times to read to your child often include naptime, bath time, and bedtime.
- **Make reading fun and enjoyable.** Find a comfortable place to read. Have your child sit on your lap or next to you so they can see the printed words and pictures. When you are reading to your child read with a lot of enthusiasm and emotion. Children love it when talk in character voices and make sound effects.

- **Start with picture books.** Use books that have simple stories and have pictures that will hold your child's attention. Ask your child to help you turn the pages. Read slowly. Use different voices for different characters in the story. Name items in the pictures. Have your child point to items in the picture (Can you point to the mouse?).
- **Have your child help pick out books for you to read.** Remember that you will get tired of reading the same book over and over long before your child does. It is good for children to hear the same book again and again. They will remember specific words and sentences and have fun saying them with you. Pause in places and have your child finish the sentence from memory.
- **Help your child learn that reading goes from left to right and from top to bottom.** Use your finger to follow the words as you read to your child.

Teach your child to recognize and name the letters of the alphabet

Parents can help their preschool-aged children recognize and name the letters of the alphabet through various activities. However, it is important to remember that most children have not mastered the alphabet when they enter kindergarten.



- **Label letters and their sounds.** Point out specific letters in different places (on signs, on boxes, etc.) Use magnetic letters on your refrigerator.
- **Read alphabet books with your child.** As your child starts recognizing certain letters have them name the letter before you do. Show enthusiasm when they correctly label a letter.
- **Teach your child the alphabet song.** Sing the song together during fun activities (such as bathtime).
- **Play letter finding games.** Ask your child to point out letters in words that she sees on signs. Have your child find letters in books and magazines.
- **Use videos and computer programs that focus on learning the alphabet.** Videos, certain television programs (such as Sesame Street), and computer programs can help children learn the alphabet (see the listing of internet resources at end of this publication for suggestions)

Help your child to recognize words

To read and write children have to understand that letters are symbols that represent different sounds of speech. Children who have reading problems in elementary school often do not understand these sounds well. Here are some suggestions for helping your child learn to recognize words after they have started recognizing letters:

- **Teach your child that letters are put together to form words.** Use magnetic letters on your refrigerator to spell your child's name. Have a word of the day. Spell simple words like "cat" or "hat."
- **Teach children how words are broken down into different sounds and how to blend these sounds.** Computer programs such as those listed under "Helpful Reading-Related Websites for Parents and Children" can help children learn these sounds in a fun way. Teach your child that different words can start with the same sound (e.g., bag, ball, bug)
- **Help your child learn to recognize his printed name.** Print your child's name in different places. Put his name on a sign on his bedroom door, on his clothes and inside the front cover of his books.
- **Point out familiar words everywhere you can.** When you pass a sign with a familiar word point it out to your child.

Help your child start to read

After your child starts school and is learning to read it is important to encourage your child to read books.

- **Team read with your child.** As your child learns to recognize words, have her say certain words as you read a book to her. As her reading skills improve alternate reading sentences and then paragraphs with her. Provide a lot of encouragement.
- **Let your child master reading simple books.** Let him read the same books over and over.



Help your child understand what is read

Many children can read out loud well but they don't understand what they are reading. Here are some things you can do to help your child better understand what they have read.

- **Talk about stories you and/or your child have read.** Have your child retell the story in his/her own words. Help them out in understanding the story when necessary.
- **Ask your child questions about stories you and/or your child have read.** It often helps to use "Wh" questions (Who, What, Where, and Why) about the stories. Ask what happened in the story. Ask who did what and why.

Help your child develop a love of books

Try to help your child develop a life long love of books and reading. Make books an important part of your family and home.

- **Visit the library with your child on a regular basis.** Let your child choose (within reason) what books to check out. Let her get her own library card whenever possible.
- **Help build a book collection for your child.** This doesn't have to cost a lot of money. You can purchase books cheaply at garage sales. Exchange books with other families. Suggest to others that they buy books for your child as presents instead of just toys.
- **Let your child see you reading books.** Show him that reading is fun and important. Remember, if children see their parents watching a lot of television they will want to watch more television. If they see you reading they will want to read more. Check out books for yourself when you visit the library with your child.

Tame your child's TV viewing

It's not just the inappropriate things that children see on television that is of major concern. When children watch an excessive amount of television it takes away from time they can spend doing other more valuable activities such as playing, interacting with other children, and reading. It is important that early television habits do not interfere with your child becoming a good reader as they get older. From an early age set firm limits on what your child can watch and how much time they can spend watching television. Is your child on track to becoming a reader?

Is Your Child On Track to Become a Reader?

According to information from the National Institute for Literacy:

Most 3-Year-Olds:

- Like to read with an adult
- Listen to stories you read
- Look at pictures in books
- Say the name of certain objects in books
- Recognize a book by its cover
- Pretend to read books
- Comment on characters in book

Most 5-Year-Olds:

- Show an interest in books and reading
- Might try to read
- Can follow a series of events in some stories
- Ask questions and make comments that show understanding of the book you are reading
- Know the difference between pictures and print in a book (and that it is the print that you read)
- Know that each letter in the alphabet has a name
- Can name at least 10 letters in the alphabet (especially the ones in their name)

Helpful Reading-Related Websites for Parents and Children

www.starfall.com

Starfall is a family friendly website that contains practice activities for learning how to read. Children can use it to practice naming letters, making letter sounds, rhyming words, and reading simple stories.

www.readingrockets.org

Reading Rockets is a national multimedia project offering information and resources on how young kids learn to read, why so many struggle, and how caring adults can help

www.pbskids.org

PBS website where parents and children can explore favorites such as Berenstain Bears and Clifford, play reading games, create e-stories, and print worksheets.



AR State PIRC/Center for Effective Parenting

Little Rock Center: (501) 364-7580

NW Arkansas Center: (479) 751-6166

For additional resources, visit our website:

www.parenting-ed.org

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