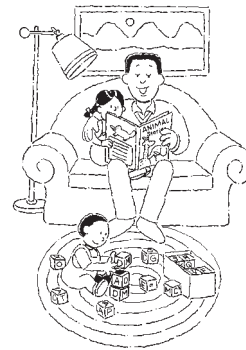


Helping Your Child Learn to Read



Does your child listen closely during story time? Does your child like to look through books and magazines? Does your child like learning the names of letters? If the answer is “yes” to any of these questions, your child may have already learned some important early reading skills and may be ready to learn some of the basics of reading. This brochure gives tips on how to make reading a family tradition and how to help your child develop a love of learning.

Reading tips

The following are a few tips to keep in mind as your child learns to read:

- Set aside time every day to read together. Many children like to have stories read to them at bedtime. This is a great way to wind down after a busy day and get ready for sleep.
- Leave books in your child's room for her to enjoy on her own. Make sure her room is reading-friendly with a comfortable bed or chair, bookshelf, and reading lamp.
- Read books that your child enjoys. After a while, your child may learn the words to her favorite book. When this happens, let your child complete the sentences or take turns reciting the words.
- Do not drill your child on letters, numbers, colors, shapes, or words. Instead, make a game out of it and find ways to encourage your child's curiosity and interests.

Start the process early

A child as young as 6 months of age can begin to enjoy books. The following are some age-by-age activities to help your young child learn language and begin to make the connection between words and meaning:

Birth to 1 year of age

- Play frequently with your baby. Talk, sing, recite rhymes, and do finger plays. This helps your baby learn spoken language and builds a strong foundation for reading.
- Talk with your baby, making eye contact. Allow time for your baby to respond before moving on to the next idea.
- Give your baby board books or soft books to look at, chew on, or bang on the table.
- Look at picture books with your baby and name the objects that he sees. Say things like “See the baby!” or “Look at the puppy!”
- Snuggle with your baby on your lap and read aloud to him. He may not understand the story, but he will love to hear the sound of your voice and the rhythm of the language.

1 to 3 years of age

- Read to your child every day. Allow your child to pick which books he wants, even if he picks the same one time and time again!
- Let your child “read” to you by naming objects in the book or making up a story.

- Make regular trips to the library with your child. Most children find it very exciting to get a library card. Make this moment something to celebrate.
- Continue to talk, sing, recite rhymes, and play with your child.

3 to 5 years of age

- By 3 to 5 years of age, most children are just beginning to learn the alphabet—singing their ABCs, knowing the letters of their names. Read alphabet books with your child and point out letters as you read.
- Help your child recognize whole words as well as letters. Learning and remembering what words look like are the first steps to learning to read. Point out common, everyday things like the letters on a stop sign or the logo on a favorite restaurant.
- As you read together, ask your child to make up his own story about what is happening in the book. Keep reading a part of your child's bedtime routine.
- Some educational television shows, videos, and computer programs can help your child learn to read. They can also make learning fun. But you need to be involved, too. If your child is watching *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* or *Sesame Street*, for example, sit and talk about what the program is trying to teach. Limit screen time to no more than 1 or 2 hours per day of educational, nonviolent programs.
- If possible, give your child a subscription to a children's magazine. Children love getting mail, and it is something they can read as well!
- Provide opportunities for your child to use written language for many purposes. Write shopping lists together. Compose letters to send to friends or relatives.

Reading aloud with your child

Reading books aloud is one of the best ways you can help your child learn to read. This can be fun for you, too. The more excitement you show when you read a book, the more your child will enjoy it. The most important thing to remember is to let your child set her own pace and have fun at whatever she is doing. Do the following when reading to your child:

- Run your finger under the words as you read to show your child that the print carries the story.
- Use funny voices and animal noises. Do not be afraid to ham it up! This will help your child get excited about the story.
- Stop to look at the pictures; ask your child to name things she sees in the pictures. Talk about how the pictures relate to the story.
- Invite your child to join in whenever there is a repeated phrase in the text.
- Show your child how events in the book are similar to events in your child's life.
- If your child asks a question, stop and answer it. The book may help your child express her thoughts and solve her own problems.
- Keep reading to your child even after she learns to read. A child can listen and understand more difficult stories than she can read on her own.

Listening to your child read aloud

Once your child begins to read, have him read out loud. This can help build your child's confidence in his ability to read and help him enjoy learning new skills. Take turns reading with your child to model more advanced reading skills.

If your child asks for help with a word, give it right away so that he does not lose the meaning of the story. Do not force your child to sound out the word. On the other hand, if your child wants to sound out a word, do not stop him.

If your child substitutes one word for another while reading, see if it makes sense. If your child uses the word "dog" instead of "pup," for example, the meaning is the same. Do not stop the reading to correct him. If your child uses a word that makes no sense (such as "road" for "read"), ask him to read the sentence again because you are not sure you understand what has just been read. Recognize your child's energy limits. Stop each session at or before the earliest signs of fatigue or frustration.

Most of all, make sure you give your child lots of praise! You are your child's first, and most important, teacher. The praise and support you give your child as he learns to read will help him enjoy reading and learning even more.

Learning to read in school

Most children learn to read by 6 or 7 years of age. Some children learn at 4 or 5 years of age. Even if a child has a head start, she may not stay ahead once school starts. The other students most likely will catch up during the second or third grade. Pushing your child to read before she is ready can get in the way of your child's interest in learning. Children who really enjoy learning are more likely to do well in school. This love of learning cannot be forced.

As your child begins elementary school, she will begin her formal reading education. There are many ways to teach children to read. One way emphasizes word recognition and teaches children to understand a whole word's meaning by how it is used. Learning which sounds the letters represent—phonics—is another way children learn to read. Phonics is used to help "decode" or sound out words. Focusing on the connections between the spoken and written word is another technique. Most teachers use a combination of methods to teach children how to read.

Reading is an important skill for children to learn. Most children learn to read without any major problems. Pushing a child to learn before she is ready can make learning to read frustrating. But reading together and playing games with books make reading fun. Parents need to be involved in their child's learning. Encouraging a child's love of learning will go a long way to ensuring success in school.

The American Academy of Pediatrics gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the Reach Out and Read program in the development of this brochure. Reach Out and Read is a pediatric early literacy program that makes literacy promotion and giving out books part of pediatric primary care. This program is endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics. For more information about Reach Out and Read, please contact the program at

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Dyslexia

Does your child reverse letters or numbers or see them upside down?
Does he read very slowly, really struggle to decode words, or continually misspell fairly simple words?

Most children have these problems when they are first learning to read. However, if no improvements are made over several years, these problems may be a sign of *dyslexia*, a reading disorder. Today, dyslexia is easier to identify than other learning problems. Talk to your pediatrician if, by 7 years of age, your child often does the following:

- Confuses the order of letters in words
- Does not look carefully at all the letters in a word, guessing what the word is from the first letter
- Loses his place on a page while reading, sometimes in the middle of a line
- Reads word by word, struggling with almost every one of them
- Reads very slowly and tires easily from reading

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

From your doctor

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