

SCHOOL READINESS SERIES
FOR
PRECHOOL
PARENTS

Getting Ready *for* Reading



THE
PARENT
INSTITUTE®

One of a Series of Booklets for Parents



Why Is Getting Ready to Read So Important?

It is almost impossible to go through a day without reading. Reading affects almost every aspect of life, from cooking to doing homework to shopping.

And when it comes to school success, reading skills are essential. Being a strong reader can help your child excel in every subject, including science and math.

Fortunately, researchers have found many ways to prepare children for reading—activities you can do right at home. These activities have other benefits, too. For example, they build verbal skills, attention span and imagination.

And let's not forget one of the most important reasons to encourage reading—it's fun! Reading teaches about fascinating people, interesting topics and faraway places.

As your child gets ready to read, keep in mind that your goal is to teach her* *about* reading, not *how* to read. Some preschoolers learn to read naturally, but many don't. Most children who don't read by kindergarten have no trouble catching up to those who do.



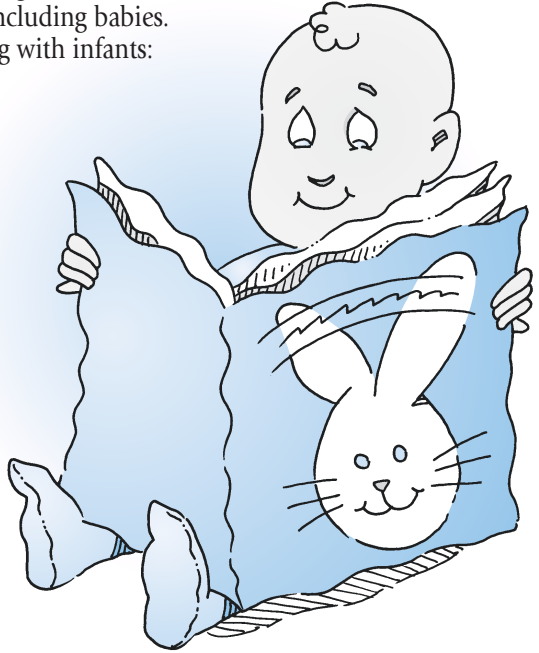
**Every child is unique, so we often use the singular pronoun.*

We'll alternate using "he/him" and "she/her" throughout this booklet.

Start Reading to Your Child in Infancy

It's *never* too early to start reading to your child. Studies show that being read to helps children of all ages, including babies. Here are some tips for reading with infants:

- **Read, sing and talk** to your baby from the beginning. Remember that it helps babies to hear rhymes, words and sentences in addition to “baby talk.”
- **At about six months,** show your baby brightly colored picture books. Cuddle up and describe what you see.
- **At about nine months,** try books with pictures and names of familiar objects, such as apple, bottle or cup. Let your infant hold and touch baby-safe books.
- **Use different tones of voice** and other “special effects,” such as making funny faces. This helps keep babies interested.
- **Read to** your baby every day, but keep sessions short.

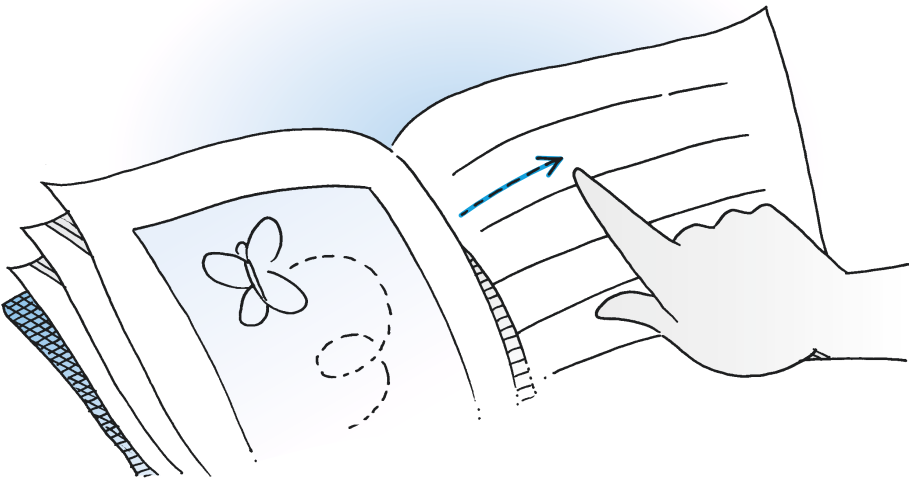


Make the Most of Reading Time

It's important to spend at least 10 to 15 minutes a day reading with your child—and to help your child learn as much as possible during this time. For instance, instead of simply reading aloud, you might ask your child to help turn the pages. This teaches him that pages turn from right to left.

Here are some other ways to make reading time more meaningful:

- **Allow your child** to choose the book you will read. If that's too difficult for him, pick out a few books and let him select one.
- **Remember that it's okay** to read some words your child doesn't know. Hearing them in the context of the story will help him learn.
- **Point to words** as you read. This shows that words read from left to right.



- **Leave out a familiar word** in a sentence and let your child fill in the blank. For example,

“Sam was bouncing his _____.”

- **Ask your child** questions about the story you’re reading. Here are some suggestions:
 1. What do you think will happen next?
 2. How do you think this character feels right now?
 3. What would you do if you were this character?
 4. Does this story remind you of anything that has happened to you?
 5. How do you think this story will end?
 6. How would you change this story?



- **Answer your child’s questions**, even if she interrupts the story. And if she wants to stop reading or skip a few pages, that’s okay, too. Enjoying reading is more important than finishing the book.

Plan Reading-Related Activities

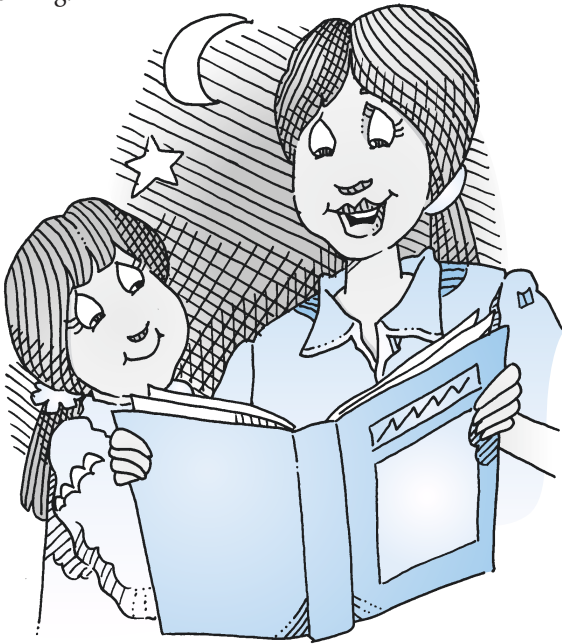
Reading aloud isn't the only way to build your child's enthusiasm about books. Here are some ideas to make reading a larger part of your child's life:

- **Act out favorite stories.** Choose a book your child loves and ask which character he'd like to play. Have family members take on supporting roles.
- **Let your child "read" to you.** Reverse roles and have him turn the pages and tell you the story.



- **Write to authors.** Have your child draw a picture for the author of his favorite book. Send the drawing to the writer in care of the book's publisher and you may get a response. The librarian at your local library can help you find the publisher's address.

- **Record books.** For times when you can't read with your child, record yourself reading favorite books. Be sure to include cues so your child knows when to turn the page.
- **Write your own book.** Have your child dictate a story to you. Then write one or two sentences per page, leaving room for your child's illustrations. Punch holes in the pages and tie them together with yarn or ribbons.
- **Allow late-night reading.** Occasionally, allow your child to stay up as late as she wants, as long as she's looking at books. Choose a night when she can sleep late the next morning.



- **Provide varied experiences.** A wide range of experiences gives children the foundation for understanding what they read. A child who has seen and touched a sheep, for example, will be interested to learn the words *sheep*, *wool* and, of course, "*baaa*."

Take Trips to the Library

Another way to help your child develop a love of reading is to visit the library often. While you're there, look for other things you can do in addition to checking out books. Here are some examples:

- **Sign up for a library card.**

Your child will enjoy having his own card and the sense of responsibility that comes with it.

- **Attend children's events.**

Many libraries have special programs for children, such as story hours, puppet shows and visits from authors.

- **Do research.**

Next time your child asks a difficult question, find the answer at the library. For example, "What are clouds made of?" "Where do tigers live?"

- **Donate books.** Libraries often accept gifts of new and used books. If you don't have books to give, see if your child can help in another way with a book collection event.

- **Talk with your librarian.** She can help you find high-quality books that match your child's skills and interests.

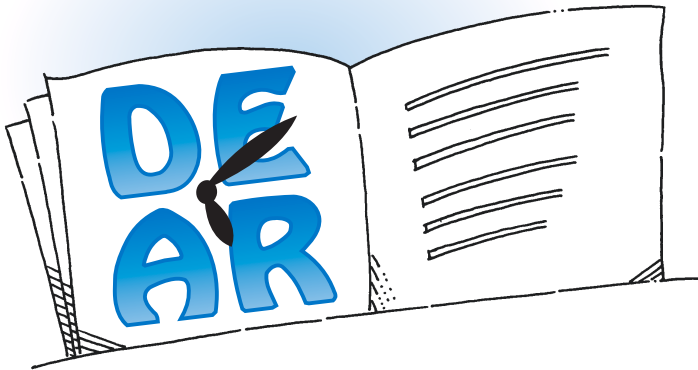
- **Explore audio and video collections.** Some libraries have audio books and videos that build reading skills.



Make Reading a Family Affair

One of the best ways to show your child that reading is important is to read yourself. Seeing you and other family members read teaches your child that reading is fun. Here are some ways to get the whole family involved:

- **Choose a special place for reading.** Pick a quiet, cozy spot away from the TV and radio. Stock it with plenty of books, magazines and newspapers.
- **Find funny places to read.** For example, in a tent or under a tree. Have a family contest to determine “The Most Unusual Place I Ever Read.”
- **Plan a “reading dinner.”** Announce the meal beforehand. That night, let everyone bring a book to the table. Talk about each family member’s choice and read excerpts aloud.
- **Tell stories.** Gather the family for a night of storytelling. You can tell true stories or made-up tales. This will teach your child about how stories—and books—are created.

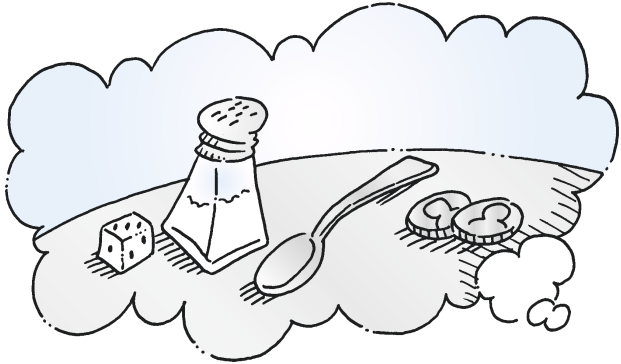


- **Schedule “D-E-A-R” time.** This stands for *Drop Everything And Read*. During this time, everyone in the family grabs a book and reads without interruption. Try reading periods of 15 to 30 minutes.

Practice Pre-Reading Skills

The abilities that combine to help children read often involve seeing, talking, listening and thinking. You can help your child improve these skills by planning activities that include:

- **Rhyming.** Explain that when words rhyme, they start differently but end the same way. Together, think of words that rhyme, such as *cat*, *hat* and *bat*. You can also say two words and ask your child whether they rhyme.
- **Phonics.** This involves teaching your child about the sounds of words and letters. For instance, "Let's think of words that start with the letter *t*."
- **Visual discrimination.** Talk about things that look alike or different. For example, a penny is smaller than a quarter. Or grass is green and so are leaves.
- **Visual memory.** Many games build memory skills. Here's one: Place a few objects on a table and discuss them with your child. Then have her close her eyes and remember as many items as she can.



- **Repetition.** Hearing words and sounds repeatedly helps children become comfortable with them. Numerous games, books and songs include repetition. Dr. Seuss books are a good example.

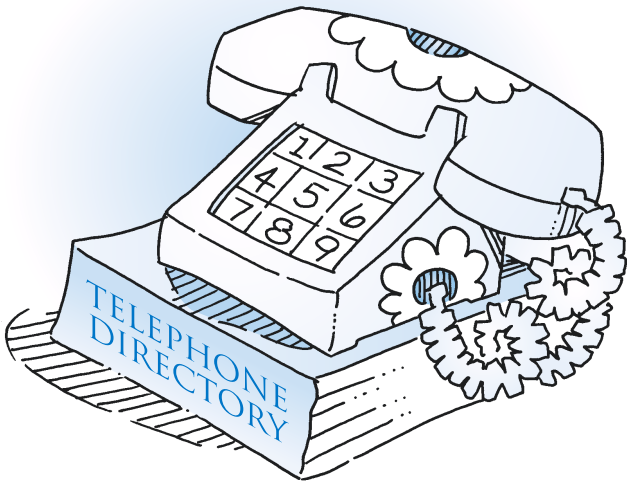
- **Recognizing letters.** Being able to identify individual letters will eventually help your child read. Here are some activities that teach about letters:
 1. **“Alphabet Concentration.”** Print the letters of the alphabet on two sets of 3" x 5" cards. Shuffle the cards and lay them face-down. Players try to make a matching pair by turning cards up, one at a time. For very young children, start with a few pairs and gradually work up to the entire deck.
 2. **Make shapes.** Have your child make letters in fun ways, such as with paint, play dough or glitter-covered glue. He can even practice making letter shapes with his body.
 3. **Take dictation.** Write down things your child says. For example, have him dictate a letter to a favorite relative. Write in large letters so he can see what you have printed.

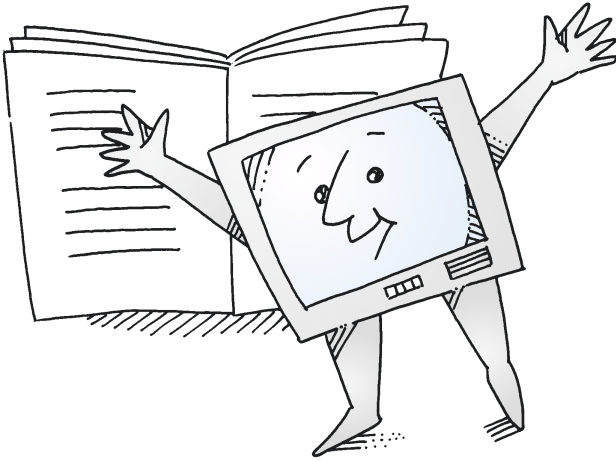


Surround Your Child with Words

You may not notice it, but your child is actually learning about reading all day long. As you read things every day, such as food packages and street signs, you are modeling reading for your child. To make these learning experiences even more productive:

- **Read aloud often.** While shopping, point to “for sale” posters. You might say, “Look! S-A-L-E! All shirts are on sale today.” This helps your child associate written words with their meaning.
- **Label items.** You can label everything your child sees or uses: *door, wall, sofa, bed, light switch.* (Hint: Use painter’s tape that won’t hurt walls or furniture.)
- **Use props.** It’s easy to add reading-related items to your child’s playthings. Here are some examples:
 1. A **telephone book** near a play telephone.
 2. A **cookbook** close to your child’s play dishes.
 3. An **old keyboard.**
 4. A **play driver’s license.** To make one, glue a small photo of your child to a 3" x 5" card. Add basic information, such as name and address. For safety, keep it at home.

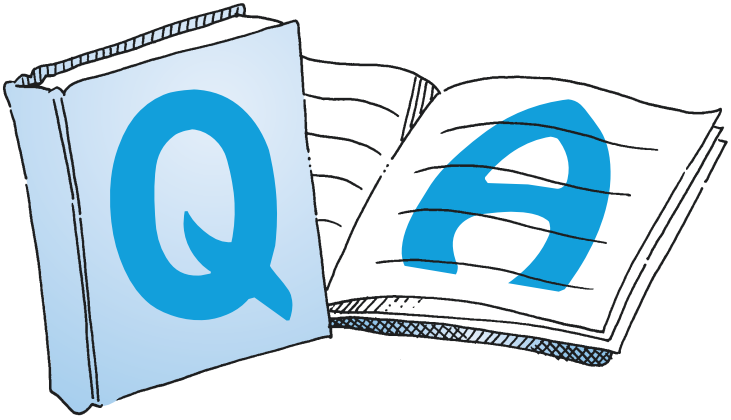




Take Time Off from Television

One of your child's biggest obstacles to reading is probably sitting right in your home: the TV. Studies show that kids who spend fewer than 10 hours a week watching television do better in reading than kids whose parents don't set limits on TV time. To reduce TV watching in your home, try these ideas:

- **Issue TV tickets.** Decide which programs are okay for your children to watch and then pass out "TV tickets," each good for 30 minutes of television time. When the tickets are gone, the TV is turned off for the week. In some families, kids can redeem unused tickets for money (to buy books, of course).
- **Put the TV set in an out-of-the-way spot.** Convenience is a big reason children watch so much TV. Experts say a child's room is a bad place for a television.
- **Keep a TV log.** Keep track of everything your child watches. You may be surprised by how much time is spent in front of the TV.
- **Make a weekly TV plan.** Write down which shows your child will watch in the coming week. Selecting a reasonable amount of TV to watch *on purpose* makes sense to most children.



Questions and Answers

Q. Why is reading aloud different from simply talking to my child?

A. Of course it's important to do both of these things, but the way people write is often different from the way people speak. Listening to books teaches children about how words are written and read.

Q. When should I read to my child?

A. Many parents and children enjoy reading at bedtime. But if your child seems more excited about reading in the morning or afternoon, take advantage of her interest then.

Q. My child loves listening to the same book over and over. Is this okay?

A. Definitely. Repetition familiarizes children with various words and ideas. Visiting the library may often help her discover new favorites, too.

Q. Will my child be expected to read in kindergarten?

A. No. But kindergarten students should have a general knowledge about books, stories, letters, words and sounds.

Reading ... A Skill That Lasts a Lifetime

There's no doubt about it—building reading skills is one of the best things you can do for your child. In fact, helping children learn about reading is so important that it's one of educators' top goals. So, make reading activities a priority. You'll be giving your child a head start in school—and in life.



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