



The Magic of Reading with Young Children

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Reading can be magical. Teaching children to love reading passes down a special kind of magic to them. Reading is a gift that will enrich their lives as nothing else can do. Begin early to read with young children and share this magic. Begin now!

Reading Magic and Young Children

Think of a favorite book that has touched your life. Do you remember *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak? How about *Where the Red Fern Grows* or *Little Women*? Perhaps you enjoyed the nonsensical rhymes of Dr. Seuss in your childhood, or have read to children about Clifford the Big Red Dog. Reading introduces a special kind of learning magic into the lives of young children.

Reading is such a valuable activity because it promotes child development, enriches relationships, and fosters creativity and imagination. Books provide an opportunity to strengthen the relationship between you and your child. Most children love the feeling of warmth and security they get being close to a parent or caregiver while listening to a story. Physical contact, combined with the sound of a parent's voice, creates a precious memory for a child. Besides strengthening relationships, studies indicate children who are read to consistently learn to read more easily than those who are not. Reading brings a multitude of benefits to young children.

Mark Twain, the famous author, once said, "The man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who can't read them." A young child literally cannot read good books yet, and so children are dependent upon parents and other caring adults who can and will read to them to learn about the world of reading.

Reading Partners – Parents and Young Children

When should you begin reading to young children? ASAP – as soon as possible! It's never too soon. Babies enjoy the rhythmic sound of a parent's voice. Toddlers enjoy snuggling onto a parent's lap. A child whose daily routine includes listening to rhythmic sounds and lively stories is more likely to grow up loving books. And a child who loves books will want to learn to read them.

Parents and other adults have a variety of times they can make connections to language, words or pictures. Routine times are great times to connect language to daily life – diaper changing time, feeding time, bedtime or reading the newspaper aloud. But reading really creates opportunities for connection and growth.

A parent is a child's reading partner.

Children thrive on the attention, feedback and learning that result from reading interactions with adults.



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You can encourage your child to read without spending a lot of time or money. Here are a few tips to get you started.

When to Read with Young Children

- Start right from the cradle! Reading aloud can help calm a fussing baby or entertain a quiet one, and it can be a

Literacy for Life – Young Children and Reading

What are some things we should know about reading and its value for young children? Consider the following observations:

- “Literacy is a gateway to achievement and opportunity . . . Strong reading, writing and thinking skills are essential not only for success in school and the workplace, but also for participation in civic life.”
– *Reading to Achieve*, 2005, National Governors Association
- “The single most important activity for building the understanding and skills essential for reading success is **reading aloud to children.**”
– *Learning to Read and Write*, 1998, International Reading Association and National Association for the Education of Young Children, joint policy statement
- “Pediatricians prescribe reading activities along with other instructions given to parents at the time of well-child visits . . . and we strongly recommend daily reading to children from 6 months of age.”
– *American Academy of Pediatrics*, policy statement

Literacy for life begins with early reading. **Research shows reading to young children stimulates brain development, lays the foundations for language and literacy, and prepares children for academic success.**

calming time for you, too. Use simple picture books.

- Establish a regular time to read with young children each day for 10 to 30 minutes (depending on the child’s age). Children will look forward to this time, especially if you are reading an exciting book or they get to pick a new one!
- Continue reading aloud even after your child learns to read. Young readers enjoy listening to many books they can’t yet master on their own. If they seem frustrated rather than interested, put the stories aside for another time. This time provides interaction and learning opportunities.

What to Read with Young Children

- Seek out books and opportunities that are wide-ranging but also focus on a child’s specific interests. Books on subjects from astronauts to butterflies may be on your child’s wish list. Allow children to use reading to explore what interests them. In the beginning, reading interest is much more important than reading ability (ability usually will come).
- Consult a librarian, teacher or bookstore when choosing age-appropriate reading material, or to find out more about award-winning or interesting books.
- Books are good, but in addition, use signs, menus, mail, billboards, cereal boxes, recipes, calendars, cards, newspapers, children’s magazines, labels and dozens of other items. A print-rich environment is easy to offer.
- Play word games. For example, do rhyming (e.g., fat, cat, sat, pat, rat), describing beginning and ending sounds (e.g., “M” for McDonald’s), or opposites (e.g., up/down). Do this while in the car or eating together.
- Write to read. Use words and pictures to let your child write notes to you:
 - notes (“I love you” or “I like it when you . . .”)
 - lists (jobs to do, shopping needs – give the child paper)
 - letters (thank you notes, invitations, cards to grandma)
 - happy notes (in lunch boxes, on pillows, on the mirror)

- At family reading time, record favorite stories or rhymes for playback. Hearing their own voices played back gives young children confidence and encourages them to speak. Or, encourage grandparents to record themselves reading a story and then have children listen as they follow in the book.

How to Read with Young Children

- Be familiar with a book before you begin reading it to children. Know the content of the book to make sure you won’t be uncomfortable with the story line or the story doesn’t surprise you.
- Can children see the book clearly? This is very important for young children, especially with picture books. Focus on the process of looking at words and pictures and describing, not reading every word. Make sure children sit where they can see clearly. Track with your finger to point out pictures or follow text left to right. (Note: At times, some children may not like to sit still and listen. Be flexible as needed.)
- Invite participation as you read. Encourage your children to describe pictures, read bits of text or guess what will happen next.
- Read slowly and with expression.
- Allow time to talk about the story or talk as you go, relating to your child’s style of learning. Hurrying through the story is perceived by your child as a duty, not a gift. Prepare yourself mentally by thinking of story time as an opportunity to slow down, learn and share with your child.
- Have a puppet “read aloud” from a book for a change. The puppet also can turn the pages.
- Expect a lot of questions and interruptions, especially from young children. Take time to answer these as you go along (being fair to all children). If you ask questions, make them open-ended and imaginative (such as “What might happen if . . . ?”). This can trigger discussion. Also, let children take turns answering questions so all feel included. Reading aloud is not a performance or a lesson; it’s a way for two or more

people to spend time together enjoying a good book.

- Turn off the TV, computer or other distractions while you are reading.
- Encourage children to value books. Provide a shelf, shoebox or basket

How is My Reading with Children?

Young children learn the value of reading from parents and other adults, and they need to know reading is important. Below is a short quiz to help you think about how you are doing in helping a child with reading.

Rate your efforts on a scale of 0 to 5, giving yourself 0 to 1 point for something you never or seldom do, 2 to 3 points for something you sometimes do and 4 to 5 points for something you do often.

Score

- ___ 1. I read to my child often (daily).
- ___ 2. I let my child pick out books we read together.
- ___ 3. I take my child to the library regularly.
- ___ 4. I talk about how I enjoy reading.
- ___ 5. I limit my child's TV viewing.
- ___ 6. I read regularly myself and let my child see me reading.
- ___ 7. I have books and magazines for young children easily available.
- ___ 8. I do projects with my child related to books we have read together.

___ **Total**

How did you score?

- Above 30 points means you're helping your child learn to value and enjoy reading.
- Between 23 and 29 points is average.
- Below 22? Try to do more of the activities listed in the quiz.

with their names on it to keep books for safekeeping. Also, make homemade book plates for inside the books to identify books a child owns. Care of books and a regular place to put them away will prompt responsibility.

- Enlarge the "audience" with your child's favorite dolls and stuffed animals.
- Be ready to listen to your child read to you. Even very small children enjoy making up stories to go with pictures in a book.
- Model reading for your own children. Share what you read as appropriate, have reading materials available (books, newspapers, magazines) and read regularly.

Conclusion

What is your plan for finding the magic with your young reader? Even after children learn to read, having parents and children to read aloud together daily still is important. Reading together stimulates imagination, develops listening skills, and provides opportunities for positive relationships between parents and children. Find the magic – read with your children!

Recommended Resources

■ Books and Pamphlets

Cullinan, Bernice E. (2000). *Read to Me: Raising Kids Who Love to Read*. New York: Scholastic Inc.

This book by Cullinan provides an overview of hands-on, practical ideas for creating an environment where children learn to read and enjoy it.

Graves, Ruth (Ed.). (1987). *The RIF Guide to Encouraging Young Readers*. New York: Doubleday and Co.

An excellent source of activities for the whole family, and a key resource for ideas to encourage and promote reading with young children. Hundreds of activities to engage children in reading, reading lists and good resource sections.

Hoyt, Carolyn. (2000). The Best Way to Teach Kids How to Read. *Parenting*, September 2000, 150-156.

This accessible, easy-to-read article provides insights on how children learn to read, why it is important and how parents can assist their children with reading.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1998). *Raising a Reader, Raising a Writer: How Parents Can Help* (pamphlet). Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

This pamphlet provides a rich set of ideas that parents can utilize in creating a good reading environment for their children. This NAEYC brochure (Order No. 530) can be ordered in units of 100 for \$15 (or 50 cents for singles) by contacting the National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1509 16th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036-1426 or calling (800) 424-2460 or going online at www.naeyc.org.

Trelease, Jim. (2001). *The New Read-Aloud Handbook* (5th ed.). New York: Penguin.

Highly regarded resource on reading with children from a leader in the field. Very good resource for parents, teachers and other adults.

U.S. Department of Education. (2005). *Helping Your Child Become a Reader* (booklet). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Education Publications Center.

This booklet shares recent research findings and practical advice on how to help your children become good readers. For a copy, send a request to: ED Pubs, Education Publications Center, U.S. Department of Education, P.O. Box 1398, Jessup, MD 20794-1398. Also, you may send a request by e-mail to edpubs@inet.ed.gov or visit the Web site at www.ed.gov/parents/read/resources/list.jhtml.

■ Web Sites and Organizations

The America Reads Challenge was a four-year grass-roots initiative designed to promote reading across the United States. Information and resources from that initiative can be accessed on the Internet. The Web site is www.ed.gov/units/americanreads/.

The International Reading Association is an organization that promotes literacy and is a well-developed resource base for parents and professionals interested in reading. It publishes a number of brochures for parents and single copies are available free. For titles and ordering information, go to the Web site or write to: IRA, 800 Barksdale Road, P.O. Box 8139, Newark, DE 19714-8139. The Web site is www.reading.org/.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). This organization is perhaps the foremost resource for outstanding research and practical ideas on learning and education of young children. It has dozens of resources (pamphlets, books, videos, etc.) available on the topic from NAEYC. The Web site is www.naeyc.org/.

The National Education Association has a Web site that includes a variety of valuable and interesting resources, including reading news, home and classroom activities, and reading resources for parents. To access the parent resources of the NEA, visit the Web site at www.nea.org/parents/index.html.

Reading is Fundamental Inc. is a national nonprofit organization associated with the Smithsonian Institution that works to stimulate reading and learning with children. For further information or to access its excellent resources, visit the Web site at www.rif.org/.

Read to Me International is an organization that works to help parents bring the joys and benefits of reading to their children. It has information on good children's books, parent resources and other topics related to reading at home. The Web site is www.readtomeintl.org/index.cfm.

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