

LEARNING TO READ AND THE PRE-SCHOOL YEARS

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Hints for parents and care givers, about learning to read.

You have young pre-school children. You think ahead to when they will begin school. You wonder what you might do to make it easy for your children to learn to read.

Read aloud daily to your children.

Reading can begin at birth, for at birth a child is born into a community of language users. How a child's family uses language to listen, speak, read and write, and whether the family values reading and writing will have huge impact on how the child learns to listen, speak, read and write. Where a child sees a parent immersed in a book, this is saying to the infant, 'Reading is enjoyable, reading is valuable'. This prompts the child to want to be a reader and a writer.

When reading aloud to an infant, make the experience a warm, loving one. You might hold the child snug on your lap. You might lie down next to him when you read a bedtime story. The child then comes to associate reading with a warm, safe time, where he/she has the undivided attention of a loved one.

Re-read favourite books. Initially the child will not understand what the book is about, but will be attracted to the colours and shapes on the page and the different sounds of the language being read aloud. Where a favourite book is re-read aloud many times, the child becomes familiar with the patterns of the language, expects certain things to be on certain pages, and learns when it is time to turn the page. The infant will reach out a hand to help do this.

As soon as young children can crawl or walk they are seen to fetch their favourite books and request that this is the book to be read. How exciting is this! Children under two years of age are already hooked on books! They know that books are enjoyable. Re-reading loved, familiar books, helps the child relate the spoken language to the written form.

Encourage children to join in. Where a story has a refrain eg 'Run, run, run, as fast as you can, you can't catch me, I'm the gingerbread man.', encourage the child to join in.

Where the text is a short rhyme, encourage the child to 'read' along with you.

When a toddler is familiar with the text of a rhyme or simple picture story book, the toddler will find the book for himself, and sit on the floor, 'reading' the book.

Encourage children to think beyond the text. With 3,4,5 year old children, sometimes ask them to think beyond the book. At a particular point in a story you might ask, 'What will happen next?', or, 'Why do you think he did that?'

Talk about the title.

With 3,4,5 year old children who have developed favourite books and know the names of the stories, you might draw attention to the title on the front cover and on the title page.

You might say: 'What is the name of this story? Yes, - "The Three Little Pigs"'

You read the title pointing to each word.

Ask the child to read the title pointing to each word.

When the child can easily read and point to the title, you might draw attention to some of the letters in the title, using the letter names.

You might say, 'Do you see any letters the same as in your name? Yes, 'Pigs' starts with letter 'p' and 'Peter' starts with letter 'p'.

'Do you know the names of any other letters in the title?'

Local library.

Do you know if there is a public library near where you are living? If so, join, and take advantage of its services. Public libraries usually have the most up to date titles, and the library staff are very informed about books. Check with them about appropriate books to borrow for particular ages. In addition libraries have copies of taped books.

Often children's authors attend public libraries, to read their books to children or to give talks about their books. Enquire about these sessions.

Environmental print.

When out in the local community with your child, talk about any environmental print you see. For example, stop and look at the street sign displaying the name of your street, or at the names of particular shops you are visiting eg Pet Shop. You might ask the child to read the words. You might also ask if he/she knows how many words there are (two). If your children are four or five years old and starting to learn the names of the letters in their names, you might ask if they see any letters the same in 'Pet Shop' as in their particular name.

Similarly when driving with your child in the car, point out and read the road signs. Soon your child will be calling out the signs, eg 'Left turn only.'

Conclusion

Some children commence school never having been read to. This is not always because parents don't see value in reading aloud to children, but sometimes it is because of lack of money to buy books for the home.

Where children have been read aloud to in the pre-school years, they enter school knowing so much about reading. They know,

reading is enjoyable

reading starts at the front of the book. It progresses from top of the page to the bottom of the page, from left to right.

picture story books have writing and illustrations.

writing consists of words, and letters.

At school entry, children who have been read to from birth, are a considerable distance along the reading continuum. Some enter school being able to read.

Websites

There are many websites with lists of suggested books to read to children, of different ages. Below are listed just a few.

www.oprah.com/packages/kid-reading-list.html -United States

www.teachersfirst.com/100books.cfm

www.udel.edu/ETL/RWN/ReadingLists.html