

Reading With Your Child

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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.

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 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.

Selecting Books to Read with Children

Choosing books that are appropriate to the age and interests of a child is important. When we read with our children, we not only share information, we share a special connection with them emotionally, as well. Some suggestions to consider in choosing books include:

- Make sure the book or story you select is appropriate to the child's age level and interests.
- Let the child assist in picking out books to read that he or she finds appealing and you approve.
- Utilize lists of highly regarded children's literature (Caldecott Awards, Newbery Medal, etc.) to select reading materials.
- Look for stories that capture the attention of children quickly and are enjoyable.
- For very young children, select books that are visually interesting and interactive.
- Pay attention to elements of the story, such as a simple plot, the setting (interesting events), the main idea, quick action, well-defined characters, vivid word pictures and the three R's – repetition, rhythm and rhyme.

Additional Resources

The International Reading Association
Visit: www.reading.org/

The National Association for the
Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
Visit: www.naeyc.org/

The National Education Association
Visit: [www.nea.org/home/
parentpartnershipresources.html](http://www.nea.org/home/parentpartnershipresources.html)

Reading is Fundamental Inc.
Visit: www.rif.org/

Read to Me International
Visit: www.readtomeintl.org/index.cfm

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 storyline.
- 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 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 read aloud together daily is still 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!

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.

This publication is based on "The Magic of Reading with Young Children" (FS-671, Bright Beginnings #16) and "Reading Choices and Children" (FS-673, Bright Beginnings #18) from the NDSU extension service.

For more information on this and other topics, see: www.ag.ndsu.edu

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