

Getting Your Child Ready to Read



Getting ready for literacy

Long before children start school, they are gaining the skills and understandings they will need for success in school and in life—including the skills that lead to literacy.

Literacy isn't just reading—it includes writing, speaking, listening, and all the ways we use language to interact and communicate with each other.

Teachers and researchers know that learning literacy skills is easier for some children than for others. But, in general, those who arrive at school with the following kinds of experiences and understandings are at an advantage:

- Ability to recognize a variety of letters, signs, pictures, and sounds
- Exposure to spoken and written words and numbers
- Experience taking part in conversations, listening to stories, asking and answering questions, singing songs, and using language to communicate
- Exposure to books, magazines, newspapers, signs, games, and other forms of print
- Experience drawing, painting, and scribbling with pencils, pens, crayons, or paints

A hunger for learning

Babies are born with a hunger to understand and interact with the world around them. As a parent or caregiver, you can stimulate your child's appetite for learning by providing a safe environment with lots of colors, shapes, sounds, and textures to explore. You can encourage your child's learning by sharing the experience, giving names to the objects and sounds your child sees and hears, and showing your pleasure at these discoveries.

These moments of sharing are a perfect time to introduce books to your child's environment by including a few large, soft letters and cloth books among his or her toys.

Introducing books

"Parents are the introducers of books," according to Dr. Lesley Morrow of Rutgers University and past president of the International Reading Association. "They teach their children how to select books, how to turn the pages, how to read from left to right and front to back."

Morrow recommends setting an example by making storytime a special way to spend time together. Cuddle your child, turn off the television, and allow him or her to select the books and turn the pages. If you can, read through the book yourself before reading it aloud. You'll be a better storyteller and be able to draw connections between the story and your child's life.

With very young children, it sometimes seems as though they're not listening to the story. But even babies and toddlers are ready to have reading time together. As Morrow points out, "Children might look like they're not paying attention as they're banging or biting the book, but they're still assimilating the experience."

Literacy in the environment

Here are some practical ideas that will help encourage your child's interest in literacy:

- Set a good example: Let your child see you reading and writing, both as part of your daily responsibilities and just for fun.
- Make labels with the names of household objects and stick them on those objects. This will help your child begin to recognize letters and words.
- Give everything a name. Build your child's vocabulary by pointing out interesting objects and parts of objects, like wheels, handles, petals, and tails.
- Talk with your child as often as you can, and let him or her hear your conversations with others. Pay attention when your child talks to you, and respond whenever you can.
- In public, point out signs, labels, and logos to your child. Children like knowing what is going on around them and will begin identifying familiar signs. Challenge your child to find a new word each time you're out and about.



Encouraging your beginning reader

- Keep lots of reading materials around your home. Help your child start a collection of his or her favorites.
- Visit libraries, bookstores, newsstands, and yard sales to borrow and buy books. Talk to a children's librarian about how to select books for your child.
- Introduce your child to many different kinds of reading materials: storybooks, picture books, informational books, magazines, diaries, newspapers, and more.
- Be willing to read books over and over again. The more familiar the book is, the greater your child's comprehension and confidence will be in reading it. Eventually, he or she will want to read the book aloud to you!



Literacy begins at home

Children who are exposed to literacy early and often are likely to become better readers and writers than those who lack this exposure, so look for opportunities to fill your child's world with print—books, magazines, charts, letters, drawings, and words of any kind.

Encourage your child's emergent literacy by talking about words, pictures, and ideas. Read together and write messages and stories for each other. Look for opportunities to exercise your child's growing language skills. Several ideas can be found in this brochure. For other suggestions, visit the International Reading Association website, www.reading.org.

Getting Your Child Ready to Read is one in a series of brochures produced in response to questions that parents frequently ask about their children's reading instruction. Single copies may be downloaded free at the Association's website, www.reading.org. Bulk copies may be purchased online or by telephone at 302-731-1600.

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- Enhance the professional development of reading educators worldwide
- Advocate for research, policy, and practices that support the best interests of all learners and reading professionals
- Establish and strengthen national and international alliances with a wide range of organizations
- Encourage and support research to promote informed decision making about reading practice and policy
- Provide leadership on literacy issues around the world

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