



Helping Your Child Become Reading Ready

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Published in Island Parent Magazine February 2004

Reading readiness doesn't develop overnight - it needs to be cultivated over years. Helping your child to become reading ready is an excellent opportunity for you to build a positive learning relationship with her. So, you don't have to wait – you can share the joy of books, songs, language and reading with your child right from the start.

Ideas for Supporting Babies and Very Young Children in Pre-Reading

- Talk to your baby and child often. Children who've grown up with a rich and varied vocabulary have a strong advantage when it comes to learning to read. So, have lots of conversations with your baby; sing nursery rhymes and bedtime songs; comment on what is happening. Vary your tone and vocabulary. As your child learns to speak, ask questions and listen for her answers.
- Be sure that there is an abundance of variety in your child's environment. A stimulating environment with many colours, textures, voices, spoken words, toys, books and experiences will increase your child's natural desire to "read" what's happening.
- Encourage experimentation and respond with positive feedback. If your baby reaches for an object and grasps it, congratulate her on her accomplishment. Remember, confident learners enjoy learning.
- Encourage those quiet times of concentration when your child is focused and busy.
- Let your child see you reading for enjoyment.
- Read to your child – include books in the daily routine. Use interesting tones and emphasize important words to help children follow the story if they are old enough. Talk about the story and the pictures in the books you are reading.
- Give chewable, suckable, and bangable books to your baby. It is never too early for children to enjoy kicking back with a good book of their own. Also, be sure that there are a variety of books within your child's reach.

In the beginning stages of pre-reading, you are building your child's listening and verbal skills as well as skills of gross and fine motor coordination, observation, concentration and the ability to follow directions.

Other Activities to Develop Your Very Young Child's Pre-reading Skills

- Play "I Spy".
- Play a simple rhythm with a spoon and ask your child to repeat it.
- Place 4 objects on a table; let the child look at the objects; remove one and ask her which object you took away.
- Place several objects in a bag; ask your child to reach in without looking; have her describe the object or tell you what it is.
- Look at pictures together and ask your child to select an object in the picture.
- Play "Simon Says".
- Play catch with your baby.
- Encourage scribbling, colouring and jigsaw puzzles.
- When your child does any artwork, write her name on her work.

Activities and Ideas for Supporting Older Pre-Schoolers in Pre-Reading

- Talk about the stories you read together. Make up stories about what happens after the book ends.
- With sidewalk chalk or an activity book, your child can practise tracing shapes or completing mazes or dot-to-dot pictures.
- Notice signs when you are out or labels on packages as you are shopping. This draws attention to the fact that the written word is part of everyday life.
- Visit the library for story time and to offer your child a large selection of books.
- As you read to your child, slide your finger along the text so she can see that she needs to attend to the print in a particular direction.
- Sound your child's name out as you spell it. An awareness of the sounds of the letters of the alphabet helps very much in later reading.
- Play games of grouping and classification like placing 6 objects on a table and asking which objects belong together or which object doesn't belong. You can build on this activity as your child matures to ask which objects have the same beginning sound.
- You can make crafts with letters by, for example, cutting out letters in construction paper and gluing them to index cards; making a scrap book with one letter per page, pasting pictures of things that begin with that letter onto the page (begin with 4 or 5 letters that are easy to tell apart like "m," "s," "j," "a," and "k"); or you could make cards with a letter on the front and an object on the back – again begin with 4 or 5 letters that are easy to distinguish – these cards can be used to play Memory, Go Fish or another card game.

- Later on, put letters or words in your child’s environment without pressuring the child to focus on or read the words. The idea here is to build familiarity with the shapes and look of words and the alphabet and to incorporate words into the child’s environment. For example, you might give your child some alphabet toys; make an alphabet line and put it up on the wall; put magnetic letters on your fridge; write your child’s name on any lunch containers; for your 4 or 5 year old, you might even put word cards around the house on things – “table” “counter” “stereo”.

Remember, children’s brains grow and develop through stages. Decoding visual symbols (i.e. reading) is a complex skill that your child will likely be able to tackle somewhere between 5 and 7. In the meantime, relax, have fun, talk with your child and enjoy her learning experience.

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