

Family Reading Activities

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The following is intended to help you become a parent who is great at reading with your child. You'll find ideas and activities to enrich this precious time together.

Children become readers when their parents read to them. It really is as simple as that. And here's the good news: It's easy to do and it's great fun. With a little practice you will be making the memories of a lifetime, memories both you and your child will cherish. It is best to read to your child early and often. But it's never too late to begin.

Start today. Although the following activities are designed to enhance reading aloud with preschoolers and beginning readers, a child is never too old to be read to.

With youngsters, remember that reading is a physical act, as well as a mental one. It involves hand-eye coordination. So, when you read, involve your child by:

- Pointing out objects in the pictures
- Following the words with your finger (so your child develops a sense that the words go from left to right on the page)
- Having your child help turn the pages (to learn that the pages turn from right to left)

Activity 1: Look for books

The main thing is to find books you both love. They will shape your child's first impression of the world of reading.

What to do:

- Ask friends, neighbors, and teachers to share the names of their favorite books.
- Visit your local public library and as early as possible, get your child a library card. Ask the librarian for help in selecting books.

- Look for award-winning books. Each year the American Library Association selects children's books for the Caldecott Medal for illustration and the Newbery Medal for writing.
- Check the book review sections of newspapers and magazines for recommended new children's books.
- As soon as they're old enough, have your children join you in browsing for books and making selections.
- If you and your child don't enjoy reading a particular book, put it aside and pick up another one.

Keep in mind your child's reading level and listening level are different. When you read easy books, beginning readers will soon be reading along with you. When you read more advanced books, you instill a love of stories, introduce new vocabulary, and build the motivation that transforms children into lifelong readers.

Activity 2: Books and babies

Babies love to listen to the human voice. What better way than through reading! For this activity, you'll need some baby books (books made of cardboard or cloth with flaps to lift and holes to peek through).

What to do:

- Start out by singing lullabies and folk songs to your baby. At around six months, look for books with brightly colored, simple pictures and lots of rhythm. At around nine months, include books that feature pictures and names of familiar objects.
- As you read, point out objects in the pictures and make sure your baby sees all the things that are fun to do with books. (*Pat the Bunny* by Dorothy Kunhardt is a classic touch-and-feel book for babies.)
- Vary the tone of your voice, sing nursery rhymes, bounce your knee, make funny faces, do whatever special effects you can to stimulate your baby's interest.
- Allow your child to touch and hold cloth and sturdy cardboard books.
- When reading to a baby, be brief but read often.

As you read to your baby, your child is forming an association between books and what is most loved – your voice and closeness. Allowing babies to handle books deepens their attachment even more.

Activity 3: R and R – Repetition and rhyme

Repetition makes books predictable, and young readers love knowing what comes next. For this activity, you'll need books with repeated phrases and short rhyming poems. A few favorite books are:

- *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* by Judith Viorst
- *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* by Bill Martin Jr
- *Horton Hatches the Egg* by Dr. Seuss
- *The Little Engine That Could* by Watty Piper

What to do:

- Pick a story with repeated phrases or a poem you and your child like.
- For example, read the following and vary your voice: *Wolf Voice*: Little pig, little pig, Let me come in.
Little Pig: Not by the hair on my chinny-chin-chin.
Wolf Voice: Then I'll huff and I'll puff, And I'll blow your house in! After the wolf has blown down the first pig's house, your child will soon join in with the refrain.
- Read slowly. With a smile or a nod, let your children know you appreciate their participation.
- As children grow more familiar with the story, pause and give them the chance to "fill in the blanks."
- Encourage your children to pretend to read, especially books that contain repetition and rhyme. Most children who enjoy reading will eventually memorize all or parts of a book and imitate your reading.

When youngsters anticipate what's coming next in a story or poem, they have a sense of mastery over books. When children feel power, they have courage to try. Pretending to read is an important step in the process of learning to read.

Activity 4: Poetry in motion

When children act out a good poem, they love its rhyme and the pictures it paints with a few well-chosen words. They grow as readers by connecting emotion with the written word. For this activity, you'll need poems that rhyme, tell a story, and are written from a child's point of view.

What to do:

- Read a poem slowly to your child, and bring all your dramatic talents to the reading. (In other words, ham it up.)
- If there is a poem your child is particularly fond of, suggest acting out a favorite line. Be sure to award such efforts with delighted enthusiasm.
- Suggest acting out a verse, a stanza, or the entire poem. Ask your child to make a face of the way the character in the poem is feeling. Facial expressions bring emotion into the performer's voice.
- Again, be an enthusiastic audience for your child. Applause is always nice.
- If your child is comfortable with the idea, look for a larger setting with an attentive, appreciative audience. Perhaps an after-dinner "recital" for family members would appeal to your child.
- Mistakes are a fact of life, so ignore them.

Poems are often short with lots of white space on the page. This makes them manageable for new readers and helps to build their confidence.

Activity 5: Read to me

It's important to read to your children, but equally important to listen to them read to you. Children thrive on having someone appreciate their developing skills. For this activity, you'll need books at your child's reading level.

What to do:

- Listen attentively as your child reads.
- Take turns. You read a paragraph and have your child read the next one. As your child becomes more at ease with reading aloud, take turns reading a full page. Keep in mind that your child may be focusing on how to read, and your reading helps to keep the story alive.
- If your children have trouble reading words, you can help in several ways:
 - Tell them to skip over the word, read the rest of the sentence, and ask what word would make sense in the story
 - Help them use what they know about letters and sounds

- Supply the correct word
- Tell children how proud you are of their efforts and skills.

Listening to your children read aloud provides opportunities for you to express appreciation of their new skills and for them to practice their reading. Most importantly, it's another way to enjoy reading together.

Activity 6: Family reading time

A quiet time for family members to read on their own may be the only chance a busy parent gets to read the paper. For this activity you'll need your own reading materials and reading materials for your children.

What to do:

- Both you and your child should pick out something to read.
- Don't be concerned if your child picks materials that are easier than their school reading books. Practice with easy books (and the comics) will improve their fluency.
- If you subscribe to a children's magazine, this is a good time to get it out. There are many good children's magazines, and youngsters often get a special thrill from receiving their own mail.
- Relax and enjoy while you each read your own selections.

A family reading time shows that you like to read. Because you value reading, your children will too.

Activity 7: Story talk

Talking about what you read is another way to help children develop language and thinking skills. You don't need to plan the talk, discuss every story, or expect an answer.

What to do:

- Read slowly and pause occasionally to think out loud about a story. You can speculate: "I wonder what's going to happen next!" Or ask a question: "Do you know what a palace is?" Or point out: "Look where the little mouse is now."
- Answer your children's questions, and if you think they don't understand something, stop and ask them. Don't worry if you break into the flow of a story to make something clear.

- Read the name of the book's author and illustrator and make sure your children understand what they do.

Talking about stories they read helps children develop their vocabularies, link stories to their everyday world, and make sense out of stories.