

Read to Your Kids!

From the time a child is born until he is a toddler, his language skills are growing very, very quickly. These are the most important years for language development.

Parents and caregivers play a big part in teaching early language skills. They are truly the child's first and most important teacher.

Reading to children from the time they are born is one of the best ways to develop their language skills—listening skills, speaking skills and later reading and writing skills.

And that is not all.

The child who is listening to a story, asking questions and getting involved with the reading is focusing her attention. She is learning how to concentrate for longer and longer periods—a very handy skill to have when she starts school.

The closeness and nurturing is building their self-esteem and showing them that it is okay to take risks when learning.

Some books deal with subjects that the child is worried about—the new baby, fear of the dark, bullying. Reading about a problem lets her know she is not alone with her problem. It gives her a chance to talk about it and perhaps find a way to deal with it.

Reading can be a quiet, relaxing time when you and the children can snuggle up and feel safe and warm. Whatever, let your child see that you enjoy reading.

You are doing more than just having fun and passing the time when you read all those books to the children in your life. You are giving them a good start in school and a good start in life.



The baby or toddler loves to hear your voice. With wordless books you can make up a story as you turn the pages. Make sure he can see the pictures and, as time goes by, he will join in. Look for books that the baby can't tear apart or eat. He loves the rhythm of songs and rhymes. Clap and dance and jiggle him up and down as you sing them. Remember this one? Help him with the hand motions as you recite it.

*Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, baker's man.
Bake me a cake as fast as you can.
Pat it and roll it and mark it with "B"
And put it in the oven for Baby and me.*



The preschooler likes to read about children just like her. Let her name the things she sees in pictures and soon she will start to read the words that go with the pictures. Try stories that you can all act out. Also try non-fiction books with photos of real animals and plants. She's talking a lot now and loves the silly rhymes and word games in nursery rhymes and fairy tales. Rhymes are a great way to teach language skills. Get her to make up some of her own rhymes.



*I do not like green eggs and pop.
I do not like them when I hop.
I do not like green eggs with rice.
I do not think they're very ____.
I do not like them with a dog.
I do not like them with a ____.
I do not eat them with a ducky
Because I find them very ____.*

It's okay to make up new words and play around with sounds. It's better than okay—it's fantastic.

The beginning reader (six to eight years old) has an active imagination. He can concentrate a bit more and handle longer stories. He will sometimes read by himself, but he wants you to read with him too. You play an important role in developing his thinking skills.

Ask questions that teach him how to read between the lines. You can give lots of hints to help him answer. Remember you're showing, not testing.

*Why do you think the prince was sad?
Why does the snow hare turn white in the winter?
What do you think is going to happen next?
Who is your favourite person in this story?*



Read non-fiction books with him too. These are books with information about real things in nature or the environment. Children love them because they are curious about the world around them. Get him to scan through the book to find:

- the page with the blue frog
- the text box about the extinct horse
- the name of the volcano in Peru



Help him with difficult words by showing him how **you** sound them out or break them into smaller parts. Pass your own skills on to your child.

Think of fun things to do while you're reading. Are you reading a book about fire fighters? Wear a hardhat. *On the Farm?* Get each child to make the noise of a different farm animal. *Tadpoles and Frogs?* How about having a frog jumping contest afterwards?

The older child (seven and up) reads a lot on her own, but she still likes when you read out loud to her. This is a good chance to discuss opinions about what you're reading.

She still needs help to read difficult words and understand new ideas.

Find lots of non-fiction books for her on topics that she's really into. Show her how to use the index at the back of the book to find specific details. Look up words in the glossary (a mini-dictionary) together.



(Adapted from The Nanny, Literacy Network Northeast, www.nt.net/literacy)