

Promoting Reading Success

When it comes to reading and writing, parents and other caregivers have important roles to play. Their part, however, is not to actually TEACH reading or writing, but rather to help the child have lots of experiences that will help him begin to understand reading and make him WANT to learn to read and write. The more excited children are about the nature and purposes of reading before kindergarten - the more likely they will be successful readers.

What is the developmentally appropriate way to help children under 6 learn about reading and writing?

Talk and sign to your preschooler. Give them new words and expand on their ideas: "A truck." "Yes, what a noisy, red truck!"

Children also begin to learn about reading when you read simple books, starting when they're only infants and toddlers. Point to pictures and tell children what they see. Don't worry if children lose interest before you have finished the book. Children are learning many things:

- how you hold a book
- how you turn the pages
- how you treat books

Read aloud to your child daily and give plenty of time to let your child look at books. Make words and writing a natural part of your household. Sing the A-B-C song and help your child learn nursery rhymes. These activities help your child learn phonics in a natural and relaxed way.

Children learn to read by hearing stories read to them. Children who become successful readers *have been read to—a lot!* Not just books but also signs on streets and in stores and on the sides of trucks and buses, can labels, packages, everywhere reading makes a contribution to life. Reading aloud teaches children about their world and increases their vocabulary. By listening to many books, children learn to follow the events of a story from beginning to end. Young children also learn to read from the top to the bottom of a page and from left to right.

And children learn about print by writing. However, it is not appropriate for young children to be drilled in the alphabet or to have to fill out worksheets. Rather, encourage them to dictate stories you write down-or to attempt to write their own stories.

Stages in learning to write

Children begin learning to write from the first time they ever use a crayon. Here are the stages a child goes through on the way to learning to write:

Drawing--A child's picture is often not understood by adults. Instead of asking, "What is it?" ask the child to tell you about the drawing and write what is said on the back of the picture. You'll discover how much children are already saying with their drawings.

Scribbling words--Young children believe they are writing when they scribble. The child may sometimes "read" what is scribbled. Over time your child might learn to scribble from left to right. Your child might make up letters. Gradually, your child will begin to mix real letters with their scribbling.

Invented Spelling--A child will use their knowledge of sounds to start making up writing. Many children will

write one letter for a word. Later on, a child may write letters for the first and last sounds in a word. Gradually, a child will add more letters to words.

Standard Spelling--During the early school years, a child will learn to spell words the way adults do

Make the most out of reading with your child

When reading, stop to talk about the story with your child. Children learn much more when we take time to help them make sense of what they are seeing and hearing. It helps the child become actively involved in every part of the story.

A story about a hungry bird might remind your child of her puppy. She might begin talking about dogs, not birds. Go with the flow and talk about what the book means to your child. You'll learn from each other.

Questions about the story help your child learn. Encourage them to ask questions. Ask your child:

- ▶ to name the pictures.
- ▶ to complete a sentence. Stop before the last word and see what your child says.
- ▶ to tell you what is happening in a picture.
- ▶ what will happen next in the story.
- ▶ how the characters in the story are thinking or feeling.
- ▶ if they had a similar experience.

Young children often request the same story over and over. If you can be patient and repeat the story, your preschooler may begin to see patterns and figure out how reading works.

Help your child become a reader and writer

Tips to encourage reading:

- ▶ Set aside a regular time or times to read to your child every day. Reading aloud is one of the most important things you can do for your child's education. Choose books about things your child enjoys--animals, trucks, people, etc. Select books you enjoy, too.

- ▶ Talk with your preschooler about the things that are happening in your life. Remind them of past things they might remember. Use short, simple sentences.
- ▶ Talking with young children about your daily activities helps them learn many words.
- ▶ Please your audience. Change your voice, use a puppet, act out the story.
- ▶ Help your child learn to read on their own. Collect children's books. Visit the library and let your child pick out some books.
- ▶ Help your child see that reading is an important part of your life. Let your child see you reading newspapers, magazines, and books. Point out how you read recipes or street signs.
- ▶ Set up a reading area in your home. Cushions, pillows, or a comfortable chair with ample light makes reading attractive. Store books so that children can easily reach them--a basket or low shelf might work.

Tips to encourage writing:

- ▶ Have paper, pencils, markers, and crayons available to your child. Access to writing materials provides many chances to write while playing.
- ▶ Show children lots of uses for writing--write reminders to yourself and write notes to family members (including your child). Your children will LOVE having you read the notes to them. One mother wrote a note to come to dinner, folded it into a paper airplane, and "sent" the message. The children came running, airplane in hand, to have the note read.
- ▶ Provide a notebook for your child to use to draw and scribble.
- ▶ Post your child's drawings and scribbles on the refrigerator or bulletin board.
- ▶ Take your child's writing seriously. Even if it looks like scribble to you, ask your preschooler to tell you what it says.

For further information:

Starting Out Right. A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success. (1999). Washington, DC. The National Academy Press.

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