



So you want to know more about...

Early Literacy

Read it again!

Let's be honest: most babies would pay attention if you read them the phone book with the right inflection. Sitting in that spot between your arms, up close to your chest, listening to your voice and feeling it vibrate in your chest...it's a cozy, safe place. **Lesson number one: reading is a wonderful way for adults and children to physically connect.**

As babies grow, they notice the difference in your voice when you read soft, gentle goodnight books and when you read boisterous, bouncy rhyming books. They vocalize to match your enthusiasm, and they settle down at your "lullaby" cues. **Lesson two: how you read is as important as what you read.**

When babies who have been read to since infancy begin to babble and speak, they love to "read" along

with you and name the things they see. Children need to **hear** vocabulary before they can know it and read it themselves. Sometimes they'll take the book and pretend to read to you. **Lesson three: children will imitate you if you read to them.**

Preschool children love to notice things that are similar among books *and* between books and the real world. They play games based on the stories they've read, and add the fancy words they hear in books to their conversation. **Lesson four: books are a meaningful way to reinforce concepts and help children make connections with the world around them.**

Some time between preschool and second grade, most children make the exciting leap to decoding letters and sounds and actually reading the words themselves. The timing is less

important than the fact that it needs to stay exciting and fun. If your child isn't reading when he enters kindergarten, he's absolutely normal. As long as children stay excited about stories and the idea of being able to read and record their stories and facts, reading will come. To keep that excitement burning, parents and teachers should:

- Talk to your children from the time they're babies. Narrate their days for them.
- Read to your child every day.
- Let your child see you reading.
- Stay confident that your child will read, eventually. If you believe it, she will, too.
- Read to your children even after they can read on their own. Being read to has the same benefits for older children as it does for non-readers.
- Choose beautiful and relevant books that kids just can't resist.

Book Nooks

If you want your child to look at books, make them available!

- Leave a small crate of books in the family room, bathroom, and beside your child's bed. Rotate the books.
- Keep a bag or box of books in the car, along with some books on tape.
- Tuck a book in your school-age child's backpack for the bus ride home.
- Play books on tape at bedtime.
- Make a special cozy place for reading in your child's bedroom or playroom, using pillows, blankets, and stuffed animals.
- Read at least one book or chapter every night at bedtime.
- Make regular trips to the library or bookstore a fun routine.
- Make a tradition of family reading of favorite books or passages on holidays or at family dinners.

Further reading

- *The Read Aloud Handbook*, by Jim Trelease
- *How to Get Your Child To Love Reading*, by Esme Raji Codell

Ready, Set, Read!

Learning to read involves so much more than being able to sing the alphabet song. Here are some of the skills reading requires:

- Being able to turn an image **right side up** and scan pages **left to right**.
- **Fine motor control** to turn pages one at a time without ripping them.
- The idea that **symbols can represent objects**. The first signs of this occur when very young children begin representational play: pretending a block is a telephone receiver, for example.
- **Recognition that letters are unique shapes**. This skill begins to take develop when children start noticing the differences and similarities between objects and classify them according to characteristics.
- Understanding that **letters are symbols that represent sounds**; strung together, they form words.
- **Learning the sounds** that correspond to each letter of the alphabet.
- The ability to **place letters in sequence** and decode the sounds of letters that form words.
- **Physically forming the letters**. It takes a while to get all the bumps and tails pointing in the right directions, and to gain the **muscle control** so that letters are smooth and legible. This starts with babies' pincer grasp; toddlers scribbles are first attempts to coordinate and strengthen these muscles.

Frequently Asked Questions

How can I find good books for my child's age? I get overwhelmed when I walk into the library or bookstore. Children's librarians know a million great titles and the ages they're suitable for. Online, you can search the online superstores like Amazon or Barnes and Noble using age and subject as a criteria. Small, independent bookstores are the best place to get individualized reading recommendations.

My toddler wants to read the same book over and over again. I think he's obsessed. He is—in a good way. He loves the story and is trying to take it all in, understand it, and memorize it. Let him “read” it to you. And use his love of that book as a clue to help you find other books that will catch his fancy.

My first-grader only wants to read television spin-off books...help! If those have him hooked, at least he is excited about reading. Study the books and look for similar elements in more literary titles. Here again, librarians are a great resource. Don't make a big deal out of the “worthlessness” of the books, or it can become a

power struggle. One attraction of “TV” books is that the characters and plots are familiar. But formula books are pretty boring, and he'll probably tire of them soon enough. In the meantime, he'll learn about story structure, practice prediction and comprehension, and become a more fluent reader. Also, you can look for ways to promote books and reading by watching (together!) TV that endorses good literacy practices, such as *Between the Lions* or *Reading Rainbow*.

My daughter won't sit still when I read to her. Children are hands-on, kinetic learners. Just because she's fiddling with a toy or walking around the room doesn't mean she's tuning you out. Doing these things may help her to concentrate. Try reading to her when she's in the tub or playing with blocks. Don't give up on reading to her during the day, but be sure to read to her when she's sleepy, too.