

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO READ TO YOUR CHILD

What better gift can we give our children than a love of reading?

Teaching children to read is one thing; encouraging them to want to read is another. Obviously very young children can't read themselves, so reading to them each day is such an important first step. Why?

It gets them thinking creatively, sets reading up as an enjoyable activity, gives children an appreciation and respect for books, promotes language and vocabulary development, and allows for lots of great family time. Nothing beats a cuddle on the lounge or on a huge bean bag with your child while you read a book together.

When we read to children we:

- answer children's questions
- promote language skills
- promote reading skills
- develop longer attention spans
- strengthen family relationships

Even if you don't have a lot of time, and let's be honest a lot of us don't, you can still encourage your child to read by making up stories to go with picture books with no words or attending a regular storytelling time. Most libraries offer this on a regular basis.

Reading aloud to children will develop their speaking skills and help them to make connections – the look of words, the way they work in sentences, how the word functions. Books can help children to learn to concentrate, to explore their inner feelings, to express themselves and to resolve conflicts.

Recent studies have shown that there is a direct relationship between literacy success and success within the wider world. Even self-esteem has been linked to the ability to read and write. Don't underestimate the power of books.

The experts say that children need 1,000 stories read to them before they begin to learn to read for themselves. Sounds like a lot? It's just three stories a day over a year.

The Rewarding Ritual of Reading Aloud

Parents are children's first and most influential teachers. Reading together is one of the earliest shared experiences of parents and children. When you read a story to a child, you are his/her reading teacher.

Children learn to read by being read to. Research shows that early and good readers come from homes where reading is valued and experienced regularly. The desire to read starts with the enjoyment of being held in a lap and cuddled as a story is read.

In addition to the feelings of warmth and security fostered by lap-time reading, reading aloud to children expands their world and vocabulary. It creates an appreciation of the value of print, promotes knowledge of the mechanics of reading from the top to the bottom of the page and from left to right, and helps create an understanding of a sequence of events.

Setting aside time every day to read to your child says, "I love you and I want to spend special time sharing a story with you." It further demonstrates your love for books and sets the stage for developing in your child an interest and desire to become a reader.

Let your child pick a story. Then cuddle up together to enjoy exploring the power and magic of the printed word.

Reading aloud to the children in your care can be the best time of day. Sharing a good storybook is very rewarding. You can enjoy reading aloud even more if you...

- understand its benefits for children
- increase your knowledge of children's books
- use read aloud guidelines
- extend the read aloud experience into other activities

Why Read Aloud?

Make time in your daily schedule of activities to read aloud. Reading aloud...

- develops a positive attitude toward books as a source of pleasure and information
- increases vocabulary
- expands the child's knowledge base
- stimulates imagination
- sharpens observation skills
- enhances listening skills
- promotes self-confidence and self-esteem
- offers many new friends since book characters can become quite real
- contributes to the child's problem-solving skills
- satisfies and heightens curiosity
- encourages positive social interaction

Reading aloud to young children helps them to become successful readers who love books. Help them by **READING ALOUD EVERYDAY.**

Choosing Books to Read Aloud

These suggestions will help you choose suitable books.

- Choose a storybook **YOU WILL ENJOY** reading aloud. Your enthusiasm (or lack of it) will be contagious. (Note: Always read any book before you share it as a read aloud.)
- Select stories that have an interesting plot (story line), frequent dialogue, some suspense and/or adventure, suitable emotional content for the age and background of your children.
- Match the length of the story with the children's attention spans and listening skills. Begin with short selections, increase story length gradually. Try using two or three short books in place of a longer story.

- Look for books that support and extend the children’s special needs and interests.
- Read as many children’s books as you can. Refer to book lists (found online or at the local library) for suggestions. When you find an author and/or illustrator you like, look for more of their books. Your list of favorites will grow quickly.
- Look for books that represent a variety of cultures both in content and illustration.
- A book is new if the child has not heard it. Therefore, the book’s age (i.e. copyright date) is not necessarily important.
- Expect your child to have favorite books. Honor their requests to read them over and over again. Keep introducing new selections.
- If the book you’ve chosen to read aloud is not working, stop the reading with a simple statement such as, “I see this is not the right book for us today.” Move on to another book or activity. We all make mistakes. Better to acknowledge it rather than spoil the read aloud experience.

Adding to Your Book Collection

These are some ways to make more books available for the children in your care.

- VISIT YOUR NEAREST PUBLIC LIBRARY ON A REGULAR SCHEDULE. The librarian will welcome your questions and be very helpful in choosing good books.
- Visit bookstores, both new and used, in your community.
- Look for books when you travel. Children’s books are more widely available in more kinds of stores than ever before.
- Watch for garage sales. Look for children’s books in good condition.
- Make book purchases an important part of your budget. Suggest that parents and friends donate a book in honor of their child’s birthday instead of celebrating with cupcakes. Include children’s books on your own birthday or holiday wish list.
- Build your collection one good book at a time.

Guidelines For Reading Aloud

Use these guidelines when you read aloud to children.

- Allow time for the children to gather and settle in. Make sure each child is comfortable and ready to pay attention. A gentle reminder such as “It is time to put on your listening ears,” will help. (Note: avoid taking away reading time as discipline for children who misbehave. Do not associate reading with negative consequences.)
- Make yourself comfortable. Whatever your seating arrangement, a low chair, the floor, snuggled on the couch, or in a large chair, be sure that each child can see the book.

- Point to the title as you say it, as well as the name(s) of the author and/or illustrator. Use the words “Author” and “Illustrator”. Explain that the author writes the story and the illustrator draws the pictures. Sometimes the same person does both. Gradually children will begin to ask for their favorites.
- Move the book around, either as you read or at the end of the page, so that each child can see the illustrations. This is very important because the children are “reading” the pictures as you read the words. In picture storybooks, the illustrations show a lot of the story action. Try not to block the illustrations with your arm as you turn the pages.
- Read with expression. Change the pitch (high-low), tone (gentle-rough), and volume (soft-loud) of your voice to show different characters or create a mood.
- Pace your reading to fit the story. Let your voice reflect anticipation. A short pause can create suspense. Do not read too quickly. The children need enough time to look at the pictures and think about what they are hearing.
- Get involved. Let your facial expressions show the story content by smiling, frowning, showing surprise, anger, etc.
- Point to characters or objects in the pictures as you read about them. Don’t take away from the story with too many extra motions. Use only those which seem natural and comfortable for you.
- Ask the children to take part in any story that has a repetitive phrase.
- When you have finished reading, close the book and say, “And that’s the story.” Wait a few moments. This gives the children time to ask questions or make comments. Do not ask, “Did you like to story?” or “Wasn’t that a good story?” They will want to please you with a “yes” answer and may not give their true ideas.
- If a child says they have already heard the story you are about to read, say “Oh! I’m so glad” or “Isn’t that wonderful. You will need to listen very carefully and see if it’s exactly the same story you already know. I’ll check with you when we’re finished.” Be sure to follow through. The child will probably remind you.
- Remember: reading aloud does not come naturally to everyone. Doing it successfully comes with practice.