



PARENT magazine

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HELP YOUR CHILD BECOME A READER

By the time children reach fourth grade, they must read with ease and understanding to take advantage of the opportunities for learning they will encounter later in school and in life. The road to reading, however, does not start in school. It starts at birth and continues through the preschool years. By the time a child reaches kindergarten (Pre1a), there are certain skills he or she must have in order to succeed.

The first five years in the life of a child are crucial to his later success. They set the foundation for learning and for life. In addition to assuring their children's physical and emotional health, parents need to encourage children's intellectual growth from the time they are born. To become learners, children need to develop skills in four key areas: thinking or problem solving, self control, self confidence, and language and literacy. While a good preschool curriculum will address all these areas to enhance children's school readiness, the foundation for these skills has already been set by the time a child is three years old. And even when the child is in preschool, the

role of parents in helping their children gain these skills remains vital.

For young children, everyday experiences are the avenues for teaching.



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Ready for School Checklist

Language and General Knowledge

My child...

- Has many opportunities to talk and listen
- Is read to every day
- Has access to books and other reading materials
- Is learning about print and books
- Is encouraged to ask questions
- Is encouraged to solve problems
- Has opportunities to notice similarities and differences
- Is encouraged to sort and classify things
- Is learning to write her name and address
- Is learning to count and plays counting games
- Is learning to identify and name shapes and colors
- Has opportunities to draw, listen to and make music, and dance
- Has opportunities to get first-hand experiences to do things in the world, to see and touch objects, learn new sounds, smell and taste foods, and watch things move

From *Helping Your Preschool Child*, US Department of Education, Rev. 2005

Help Your Child (continued from page 5)

The experiences will, of course, vary according to the child's age. When a baby figures out that one ball fits into a bucket and the other does not, he is learning to solve problems. When a toddler imitates what an adult does, she is learning how to respond to the world. The ability to express and manage emotions is another crucial skill a child must have to succeed in school and beyond. Even a very young child can be shown what she can do and can learn what unacceptable behavior is. Teaching a child limits and helping a child label feelings are other ways parents can help a child learn self control. In order to be self confident, a child needs to feel secure in the world and in control. Parents can foster this feeling very early on by establishing routines, by allowing children to solve problems with guidance rather than doing things for them, and for older children, giving them responsibilities they can handle.

Children's preparation for reading starts at birth, when they first hear the sounds of their parents' voices. Every time a child is spoken to or sung to and responds, the child's understanding of language increases. By the time a child is one year old, he already knows a lot about spoken language. He recognizes some sounds and knows which are important to him. Even "baby talk," which exaggerates the sounds and rhythms of words, makes a contribution to children's ability to understand language. In fact, children who do not hear a lot of talk and are not encouraged to talk themselves often have problems learning how to read.

Parents, then, should be sure to engage their children in conversation.

Research has found strong connections between the size of children's vocabularies and how well they comprehend what they read. Children learn new words both indirectly – by listening to adults' conversation and, later, by reading – and directly, by being taught new words. Conversation with parents can help children gain new vocabulary both ways.

Parents also need to be aware of the most important pre-literacy skills children need to have in order to become successful readers.

KNOWING THE NAMES OF PRINTED LETTERS

Singing the alphabet song is more than just a fun activity. Children who leave preschool already knowing the shapes (both upper and lower case) and names of the letters of the alphabet have a much easier time learning to read.

SOUND AWARENESS (PHONEMIC AWARENESS)

Children must learn that specific sounds are associated with specific letters. For example, the child can understand that the words bag, bug and ball all begin with the same sound.

They must also understand that words are made up of separate, small sounds, whether they are one-syllable words (big = /b/, /i/, and /g/) or multi-syllable words; ones that combine two words or add prefixes and suffixes (seashell, helper). Children who can identify rhymes, learn to

combine sounds to form a word and understand that words change when you add or delete syllables learn to read more quickly and better than children who have trouble with these tasks.

Questions parents can ask to promote phonological sensitivity are, for example, "What happens when we put 'tie' and 'ger' together (tiger)?" "Can you think of a word that rhymes with 'bat' (hat)? How many sounds are in the word 'big' (three: b/i/g)?"

Research has shown that most poor readers have poor phonological sensitivity. Children who have a hard



time understanding the relationships between letters and sounds and how these sounds are combined to form words must be helped by teachers and parents. If they do not get help with these basic skills, they will continue to be delayed going forward in their school careers.

Memory

Children who can remember simple, multi-step directions (wash your hands, take your plate, and sit down), or who can remember earlier parts

important activity for building the knowledge required for success in reading. It is important to read frequently with preschoolers. Children whose parents read aloud to them do much better in later development than do children who are not read to or read to infrequently.

Children learn most from books when they are actively involved. Parents can ask very young children to name objects in the pictures and also ask them questions that encourage longer, more complete answers and

the street (street signs, signs on stores, and other environmental print).

CREATING A LITERATE ENVIRONMENT

Children who grow up in homes where parents read are more likely to read themselves. Simply having books and magazines around the house will help children view them as part of daily life. Parents can also start a small library for their young children so they can “read” much-loved books on their own.

In addition, parents can provide children with the tools of literate behavior: pens, pencils, markers, paper, envelopes, and telephone books. This is also a good opportunity to recycle junk mail, which children can enjoy cutting apart and using for collages or other creative endeavors.

Doing puzzles and playing games such as Lotto, Candy Land, Old Maid, and Scrabble reinforce language and literacy skills.

A child should enter first grade with most the following skills: he should recognize the names and shapes of the letters in the alphabet; be able to write many letters on his own; recognize different letter sounds; recognize and make rhymes. A child with these skills who is interested in books and can talk about their contents is well on the way to becoming a good reader.

Research has shown that children who start behind typically stay behind in reading skills. Research has also shown a child is more likely to succeed in school with active family support. A child who learns to love books and is encouraged by a home environment that fosters reading is most likely to succeed.

“A child who learns to love books and is encouraged by a home environment that fosters reading is most likely to succeed.”

of a story read aloud to make sense of later parts have an easier time learning how to read. Parents can practice these skills with children.

Writing

Children who can write their own names, or even isolated letters, have an easier time learning how to read.

READING ALOUD

Reading aloud to children has been called the single most

descriptions. Older children can be asked how they think a book will end, or asked if they can think of a different ending. Children should also be encouraged to ask questions and talk about familiar activities and objects pictured in the book. Children as young as three years old may also want to retell the story in the book. The idea is to encourage conversation about books and encourage thinking.

Even babies enjoy “reading” books. They enjoy holding board books, turning the pages, and looking at pictures.

Parents can also show children that there are things to read everywhere – when grocery shopping, when consulting a cookbook, when walking on

