

Reading to Young Children – why is it important?

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My husband and I began reading to my son when he was only a few weeks old. It was a calming bedtime routine which we continue to this day. A wonderful time to have together, in which my husband gets to relax after a long day, and my son gets quality parent time (and learns without realising it!). Some people thought we were crazy reading stories to such a young baby but we believed that he was really benefiting from the experience. As he has grown up I have taken great interest in the use of books with children of all ages and have realised that we had been right all along.

It has long been recognised that parents play a crucial role in promoting literacy success. Research has shown that “by the age of 2, children who are read to regularly display greater language comprehension, larger vocabularies and higher cognitive skills than their peers. Shared parent-child book reading during children’s preschool years leads to higher reading achievement in elementary school as well as greater enthusiasm for reading and learning. In addition, being read to aids in the socioemotional development of young children and gives them the skills to become independent readers and transition from infancy to toddlerhood.”ⁱ Recent research has also shown that “children’s vocabulary skills have been found to be related not just to reading to the child but also to the number of books in the home, to library visits and to parents’ own print exposure”ⁱⁱ.

Reading to your child is extremely valuable regardless of age. It gives them experience of different types of language, rhythms and sounds and teaches them about many topics which wouldn't come up in conversation. But not only that, it is a wonderful way to bond with your child, and most of all it is great fun!

Top tips for book sharing

For all children:

- Make reading books an enjoyable experience. Choose a comfortable place where your child can sit near you. Be enthusiastic about reading. When children enjoy being read to, they will grow to love books and be eager to learn to read.
- Read frequently. Read to your children several times a day. Establish regular times for reading during the day (e.g. Read to them during snack time or before nap time.)
- Let other grownups join in too (e.g. grandparents, family friends, aunts and uncles)

For very young children:

- Don’t read for too long as young children get bored quickly – little and often is best.
- Remember you’re not teaching your child to read. You learn to talk long before you learn to read, book sharing is a great way to help your child’s development.

For toddlers and pre-school children

- Encourage children to talk about the book. Have a conversation with your child about the book you are reading. Welcome their observations and continue to talk about the book after you have read it. Ask them to talk about their favourite parts and encourage them to tell the story in their own words.
- Read many kinds of books. Storybooks can help children learn about times, cultures, and
- peoples other than their own; stories can help them understand how others think, act, and feel. Informational books can help children learn facts about the world around them and introduce them to important concepts and vocabulary that they will need for success in school.
- Choose books that help you teach. Use alphabet books and counting books to help you teach letters names and sounds, and counting and number recognition. Use poetry or rhyming books to support your teaching of phonological awareness. Choose stories that help children learn about social behaviour, for example, books about friendship to help children learn to share and cooperate.
- Reread favourite books. Children love to hear their favourite books over and over again. Hearing books read several times helps children understand and notice new things.

ⁱ Reading to Young Children - <http://www.childtrendsdatbank.org/indicators/5ReadingtoYoungChildren.cfm>

ⁱⁱ Reading with Young Children - Community Paediatric Review Vol 13 No 1 May 2004 - http://www.letsread.com.au/pages/documents/CPR_Vol_13_No_1.pdf?PHPSESSID=88bf8abe96a74a16094a7c7175812a3d