



## Raising a Reader

Children learn to love the sound of language before they ever notice the existence of printed words on a page. They coo or babble when you talk or sing to them, and as they grow, rapidly pick up the concepts and words they hear used. Reading aloud with children is an essential component to language development and is one of the most important activities for preparing them to succeed as readers.

As parents and caregivers, you can help lay down the foundation for a love of reading and nurture children's development. Here are some things you can do to raise a lifelong reader:

Talk, Sing, and Play Babies delight in hearing language. Talk as you do simple everyday things together: recite nursery rhymes, and do finger plays, games and action songs.

Make Time to Read Try to read with your child every day at a regularly scheduled time. If possible, choose a time when you can be relaxed and not rushed. If you have more than one child, spend time reading with each child separately, especially if they're more than two years apart. On days that are particularly hectic, bring a few books when you take children along on errands. Taking time to read to children on a regular basis sends the message that reading is worthwhile.

One More Time...PLEASE?! As every adult who cares for children knows, they often ask to hear the same story again and again. They delight in knowing what comes next and often learn a favorite book so well that they can "read" it on their own. That favorite story may speak to your child's current interests and emotional needs, so it's important for the adults in their lives to be patient during this phase. Young children are eventually ready for different stories if they are continuously exposed to a variety of books.

Slow Down It's not just what you read to children, but how you read that matters. If adults rush through stories or read without enthusiasm, children quickly lose interest. Try to read with expression and use different voices for the characters. Reading at a leisurely pace with occasional pauses gives children time to take in what they hear, mull it over, and imagine the people, places, and events. Pose a question or make a remark that will prompt the child to think, express himself, or relate the story to his own experiences. It's also a good idea to follow children's cues. Sometimes they are caught up in the story and don't want stops and detours along the way.

Choose Books with Care Reading together often, you learn a lot about the kinds of books your child likes and understands. Visit the local library and involve your child in deciding what to bring home. Selecting books that relate to what's happening in the child's life at that time is a good way to ease transitions and allay fears about upcoming events. Topics such as potty training, new siblings, adoption, or moving to a new home are covered in a variety of books that are written specifically for young children.

Surround Children with Reading Material In addition to library books, children also like having some books of their own that they can read whenever the mood strikes them. Affordable used books can be found at yard sales, thrift stores, secondhand book stores, and public library book sales. Consider subscribing to a good children's magazine--children love having something come in the mail just for them!

Don't Pressure Children About What or When to Read Nagging children about their reading habits may cause them to resist reading all-together. Some school-age children choose to read only comic books or fan magazines after their homework is completed. Try not to criticize--after all, they are reading. If a child makes a mistake when reading aloud, don't interrupt. If the mistake doesn't change the meaning, let it go.

Show That You Value Their Efforts Nothing is more important for fostering readers than showing genuine enthusiasm. Ask your child to read to you, a younger child, or a special visitor. Talk with him about what he is reading and respond positively.

Source: NAEYC. 1998. Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children. Washington, DC