

Tips for Reading to Your Child

One of the most powerful things a parent can do to encourage a child's learning is to read to the child every day.

Start reading to your child as soon as possible. Babies, of course, can't understand the words, but they love to listen to mom or dad's voice, and they can develop important visual skills like focusing and tracking by looking at the colors and patterns of a book.

Reading will develop memory and comprehensive skills, build vocabulary, and help teach concepts like colors, numbers and shapes. The books you select for your child can also convey the values and beliefs of your family. Books build emotional health by providing that all-important cuddle-up, snuggle time.

Reading to Babies (birth to 12 months)

- Choose simple books with large, colorful pictures. The pictures should not be too busy.
- Use a soothing voice as you point to and name the pictures.
- Turn the pages slowly, allowing time for the baby to focus on the page for awhile.
- Young babies may like black and white books, because they see high contrast best.
- After a month or so, colors will catch their attention with red often being a favorite.
- Rhyming books are very interesting to babies. There is some evidence that the rhyming cadence can help pattern areas of the brain.
- Remember, you don't have to use just books! Paging through your favorite magazine with your child and pointing out colors and pictures works, too.
- Don't forget singing, which is just another form of storytelling!
- Give your baby hardcover books to handle. Don't be surprised if he or she is more interested in chewing on them or just turning the pages.

Reading to Toddlers (12-30 months)

- Choose books with pictures and simple plots that are familiar to a toddler. Examples are animals, toys, household objects, eating, bath time, etc.
- Choose books with only two or three sentences per page to start, and increase this number as your child's attention span increases.
- If the text of a book is too long to hold your child's attention, make up your own words.
- Toddlers are "word hungry," so books that show lots of objects that can be named are a favorite.
- Toddlers like to predict things, so books with lots of repetition will catch their attention.
- Make animal or motor noises as you read or change your voice.
- Don't be surprised if your toddler goes through a very active stage when he or she will not sit down for storytime. Continue

reading out loud as your toddler wanders or plays.

- Books with hidden pictures, pop-out puppets or feely textures will allow your toddler to use all the senses.
- Begin a ritual of bedtime reading. Allow your child to choose the book. Don't be surprised if he or she wants the same book over and over!

Reading to Young Preschoolers (3-year-olds)

- Young preschoolers are beginning to be interested in feelings — their own and those of others. Books that explore feelings and social interaction are great: sharing, handling angry feelings, being loved, etc.
- Keep reading rhyming books and see if your child can fill in the rhyming word at the end of the sentence.
- Plots can be a little more complex now, with talking dialogue between characters.
- Try recording your child's favorite books to be listened to when you are not there.
- Young preschoolers may become interested in books with specific topics like dinosaurs, horses or cars.
- You can begin to introduce concept books, which are books that teach about numbers, letters, colors and shapes.
- Children are famous for asking questions, so be prepared for lots of them as you read!

Reading to Preschoolers (4- and 5-year-olds)

- Preschoolers will be interested in a variety of subjects and will enjoy plots that are quite complex.
- Try asking "thinking" questions as you read: "What do you think will happen if he does this?" "Why is she so happy?" "Do you know anyone who acts like that?"
- Once in awhile, try a humorous approach to a familiar book, by changing the words to something silly to see if the child can catch it.

- Ask the child to “read” a familiar book to you. This gives practice in sequencing — telling a story with a beginning, middle and end.
- Now is the time to introduce books that illustrate your family’s values.
- Help your child write his or her own book by collecting or drawing pictures, and writing what is dictated to you.
- Practice reading the words on familiar signs, food containers, etc.
- Introduce a book series — a number of books with the same characters, similar plot format, etc.

For more information,
contact the Family Life Educators
at 605-322-3660 or email us at
familylifeeducators@avera.org.

