

What's so good about reading to children?

Reading to your child is the single most valuable thing you can do. Why?

- it gives experience of different types of language, rhythms and sounds
- research shows that pre-school children who are exposed to plenty of language (books and conversation) tend to do better at school
- it teaches about many topics which wouldn't come up in conversation
- it is a wonderful way to bond with your child
- it is very calming and helps kids wind down after a long day

WARNING: READING must be FUN, not WORK!

Reading, and education in general, are serious matters, but they are only meant to be serious for teachers and parents. If something isn't fun, children won't do it. And they have brilliant ways of avoiding what they don't want to do: such as pretending they can't. Or making you feel guilty.

If your child doesn't enjoy it, he won't try. If he finds it hard, he will think he is not good at it. Your job is to make it FUN and EASY.

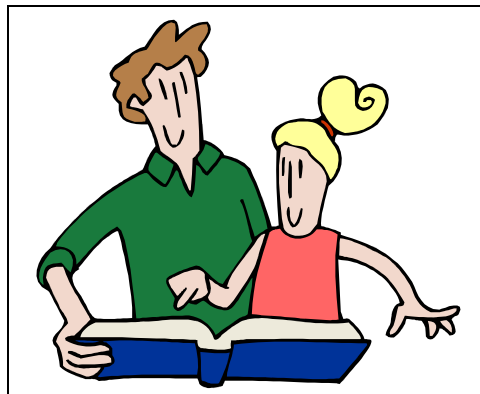
But what about babies? You can't read to babies, can you?

Yes, babies benefit A LOT when parents read to them. The effort of focusing on pictures develops eye muscles. And each time he hears a particular word, it imprints more strongly in his brain. Think: how do our brains learn? They learn by doing. Each time your baby sees, hears, or feels anything, brain connections form. Eventually, the connections are strong enough to create a skill or a piece of knowledge.

But what if I'm not good at reading aloud?

You really don't have to be good at it. Read very slowly - that's better for your child anyway as he'll be able to hear the words more clearly. If you feel your reading still isn't good enough, here are two suggestions:

- practice reading a story on your own before reading it to your child
- this is a good time to ask for help. There are organizations which help adults with their reading. Ask your Family Support Program facilitator, your child's school, or your community college for information.



What's the best way to read to my child?

First, be comfortable, cozy and relaxed - both of you. Make sure your child can see the book the right way up as you read.

For babies and toddlers up to 2 years:

- point at pictures and say or ask names of things (depending on age)
- use a slow sing-song voice; use different voices for different characters - be entertaining
- spend time talking about the pictures before turning the page
- say a name and ask your older baby or toddler to point to the item; give lots of praise when he points to the object
- use sturdy books with lots of bright colors and interesting pictures

For 2 to 4 year olds:

- give your child time to look at the pictures before you read
- ask, 'Where's the...?' 'What's that called?' 'What's she doing?'
- always follow text with your finger as you read
- with familiar stories, see if your child can join in or finish phrases
- ask questions like: 'Why did he do that?' 'What happens next?'

For 4 year-olds and over (and possibly some 3 year-olds):

- follow the suggestions above plus ask your child if he can remember the order of events in the story
- try paired reading (sometimes called shared reading) and let your child read parts of the story. Even if he's not correct, he'll get the idea.
- If you think your child may be ready for a real reading activity, try this: choose a word which appears several times (such as a name) show it to your child and tell him what it says: can your child find the same word again?
- discuss things you both liked/didn't like and why
- let your child see that reading is part of your life. Do you have books and newspapers in the house? Don't forget: the written word is all around us. We don't only read books - we read names of stores and businesses, road signs, shopping lists, advertisements, birthday cards.... All are a chance to show your child how reading works