Reading To Children

A Guide for Families

Questions, Answers, and Ideas about Why and How to Read to and with Young Children

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Introduction

Reading with children is easy. All you need is a child, a book, and you! You don't need any training or any other materials (although having your child's favorite stuffed animal nearby is always helpful), and you don't need to be a "good reader." All you need is the desire to enjoy spending time with your child. You don't need to think about teaching her/him. Your child will learn to love reading and will become a better reader and a better student just by spending this valuable time with you.

This guide is written for anyone who is interested in helping children learn to love to read. Many studies have been done over the years which show that when a caring adult reads with a child, the child is more likely to do well not only in reading, but in all their subjects in school.

The suggestions and ideas in this book are not the only way to read to children. Every child and family is different. All these ideas have worked for many families and they may work for yours. Give them a try, and try out some of your own. Explore, experiment, and most importantly, have fun! Then, once you see your child's growing interest in reading and learning about the world, share these ideas with your friends and neighbors. They will be glad you did!

Table of Contents

Part 1: Reading together is fun!

Why should I read to my child?

What is reading, anyway? Isn't it just sounding out words?

How do people become good readers?

What will my child learn when we read together?

When are children too young or too old for family reading?

Part 2: Let's get started!

But I'm not a teacher!

What if I don't read well?

English is not my native language. How can I read to my child?

Where should we read?

When should we read?

How long should we read?

What books are good to read to young children?

So, we have a place and a time and a book, what do we do now?

Part 3: What if . . .

. . . my child always wants to read or hear the same story?

. . . my child has memorized the whole book?!

. . . my child makes mistakes when she/he reads?

. . . I make mistakes when I read?

. . . I don't know what a word means or I can't answer my child's question?

. . . my child refuses to read?

. . . my child wants to read alone?

. . . my child has reading problems that don't go away?

Part 4: I want to learn more!

What can I read if I want to read more about reading?

Where can I find good books to read to my child?

How can I improve my own reading?

Part 1: Reading together is fun!

Why should I read to my child?

Reading with children is fun! But also, people who study reading and how children become good readers have found that when families read together, children are more likely to love reading, read well, and do better in school in <u>all</u> their subjects, not just reading. Most of what children study in school involves reading – even math – so reading is really important for the rest of their lives.

What is reading, anyway? Isn't it just sounding out words?

No, although sounding out words is an important part of reading. Basically, reading is looking at print and figuring out what it means. When you do this, you use lots of skills, not just figuring out the sounds. You look at the pictures, you think about what you have already read, and what you knew before you started reading. You make guesses about what will come next and what it means. All of this is reading. The more you do, the better you get.

How do people become good readers?

Good readers usually had someone in their childhood who taught them to love finding out about the world through books. Sometimes it was a teacher, but often it was a parent or relative or even a friend. Once you learn the basics of reading, you become a good reader by reading, reading, and reading! Reading lots of things, not just books – newspapers, websites, magazines, even this guide to reading to your children!

What will my child learn when we read together?

The most important thing your child will learn from reading with you is the love of reading. Children who love reading learn most of the technical skills of reading on their own and become both good readers and good students in other areas too. Here are just a few of the things about reading that they can learn from reading with you – and you don't have to teach them at all!

- ✓ Books tell stories.
- ✓ We can learn new information from reading and being read to.
- ✓ Letters are connected to sounds.
- ✓ Letters get together and make words.
- ✓ Words have spaces between them.
- ✓ You can learn new words by figuring out what they mean in the story.
- ✓ You read books in English by starting on the upper left and going to the lower right.
- ✓ Pictures in books tell us a lot about what is going on in the story.
- ✓ Reading is how come adults know so much about the world!
- ✓ Reading is fun!!

Elementary school teachers know that students who come to school knowing these things about reading do better in school and are often the best students. And remember, you don't have to explain any of these things to your child, you don't even have to think about them. Your child will figure them all out by her/himself!

When are children too young or too old for family reading?

No age is too young or too old for reading together. People of all ages, children and adults, love to read together.

- ✓ Even infants enjoy hearing their parents' voices and learn a lot from watching what adults do. If you show them that you love to be with them and you love talking to them, they will learn that long before they are ready to actually read.
- ✓ Young children love to learn and explore. Reading is a great way to share that experience with them. As they watch you read a book they will realize that this is a great way to learn lots of new things.
- ✓ As children get older they can (and usually want to) do more of the reading themselves. Eventually some children do get tired of it and want to read on their own, but they will let you know when that happens. If they are still interested at any age, keep reading!

Part 2: Let's get started!

But I'm not a teacher!

Actually, you are! You are your child's first teacher and in many things you are the best teacher they will ever have. You teach your child by what you say, but also by what you do. When you read with your children, you teach them that reading is fun and important, and that you want to spend time with them learning together. Let the teacher at school worry about all the technical stuff, just teach what you know best – that being together and learning together is a great way to spend time!

What if I don't read well?

That's o.k., your child doesn't read well either! It's not important that you get all the words right or that you talk like an actor. You and your child can improve together, and if your child knows that you are interested in improving your own reading, that gives them a strong, positive attitude about learning.

English is not my native language. How can I read to my child?

You can read to your child in your own language, "read" picture books by talking about the pictures in English or your own language, or just read as much as you can and you and your child can make up the parts you don't understand. There is no test, it's just for fun! Many public libraries have children's books in other languages besides English. Just ask the librarian.

Where should we read?

Any place that is comfortable, safe, and not too noisy is fine, but if you have a good book that you and your child are looking forward to reading together, even a noisy bus ride can be an adventure!

At home, try to find a quiet, comfortable space where you can read regularly. Going to the same place each time to read will make your child relaxed and ready to learn. Bring her/his favorite pillow or stuffed animal to make it a welcoming place.

When should we read?

The best time to read is during a quiet time of the day, when it's quiet and there isn't a lot of activity going on. Many families read just before the child goes to sleep which is a great time because the child will be relaxed and can dream about the wonderful places and adventures they experienced in the book. Children also tend to remember more of what they hear or read just before going to sleep.

It's good for your child to see you making a time in your day for reading. This shows them that you think reading is very important. If you child doesn't want to read one day, go ahead and read on your own, even if only for a few minutes. Your child may come over to see what is so interesting!

How long should we read?

It depends on the age and personality of your child. When she/he stops being interested, that's a good time to stop. Even 10 minutes a day is great. If you can read together for a longer time, that's good too, but it's more important to read regularly than to read a lot at one time. 10 minutes a day is much better than 30 minutes once in a while.

What books are good to read to young children?

For very young children, choose books with lots of brightly colored pictures but with some words too, so that the child makes the connection among the words, the pictures, and what you are reading.

Read from books that are big enough so that your child can see them easily and read along with you (even if she/he is just looking at the page).

Some children's books have texture on the page such as "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" by Eric Carle which has holes in the pages that the caterpillar ate! Let your child run her/his fingers over the pages. Don't worry if the pages get dirty – your child is learning to love to read!

There are some books that have won awards and they are usually a good choice. Two of the top awards for children's books are the **Caldicott Medal** and the **Newbery Medal**. You can find them in your public library and in elementary school libraries. There are some more suggestions at the end of this guide.

So, we have a place and a time and a book, what do we do now?

There aren't any rules for how to read with children, but here are a few suggestions for questions you can ask to keep your child interested and build their reading skills. Remember, reading together should be a relaxing, fun time, so don't make it like a test. Keep your conversation light and relaxed. If your child doesn't want to answer questions or doesn't know the answer, say, "Let's find out!" and keep reading.

Before you start reading

- ✓ Have your child look at the book cover. Ask what they think the story is about. If you've read the story before, ask what they remember.
- ✓ Point out the name of the author and the illustrator. Ask you child what an author and an illustrator do.
- ✓ Ask questions like these.
  - o *What do you see in the picture? What is going on?*
  - o *What does this make you think will happen in the story?*
  - o *Does this make you think of another story that you read?*
- ✓ After each question it's always good to ask, *"Why do you think so?"*

While reading

- ✓ As you read the story, have the child predict (make guesses) about what they see in the pictures. Predicting is an important skill in reading, and children enjoy doing it. One or two questions per page are usually enough, but sometimes you can spend quite a while having a great conversation about just one page.
  - o *What do you think is going to happen next?*
  - o *The story says, "Jenny ran out of the house." Where is she going? Why do you think she ran out?*
- ✓ If your child's guesses are correct, make sure to tell them so. Tell them they did a good job. Ask, *"How did you know that?"*

After reading

- ✓ Spend a little time talking to your child about what you read. Ask questions like these. Don't forget the magic question *"Why?"*
  - o *What was your favorite part?*
  - o *What was your favorite picture?*
  - o *What do you remember best?*
  - o (For older children) *If you wrote this story, what would you do differently?*

Some other tips for any time while reading

- ✓ Help your child connect this story to other stories you've read together and to real life.
  - o *Who does Frodo remind you of?*
  - o *Did anything like this happen in any other story?*
- ✓ Don't worry about your child not being able to answer these questions. They will make things up that will amaze you!
- ✓ Connect to other things they've read or heard about at school.
- ✓ Stop occasionally and revisit what you read, check the predications your child made.
- ✓ Remember this is not a time to test your child. Whatever they think will happen, *could* happen in children's books! Encourage your child to stretch her/his imagination. Praise the predications that turn out right, and laugh together over those that don't.
- ✓ Remember that this is reading *together*, so you make predictions too! Make mistakes! It's fun!

English is not my native language. Won't reading to my child in my native language hurt their English learning?

No!

In fact, students who know how to read in their native language usually learn to read English better than students who know how to read just one language! This is because they are learning to read without having to learn all the English words at the same time. Then, when they learn to read English in school, they already know how to read. They just need to learn the English words.

There is a free website from the University of Maryland called the **International Digital Children's Library** which has books for children in a variety of languages. You can find those books at your library or you can read many of them online at their website.

www.childrenslibrary.org

Part 3: What if . . .

. . . my child always wants to read or hear the same story?

This is fine. Children like to hear familiar stories and each time they learn from recognizing what they already know and adding to that. Read their favorite book first then read something new.

. . . my child has memorized the whole book?!

Fantastic! This is a very important skill. Just don't test them on their memory, it takes the fun out of it.

. . . my child makes mistakes when she/he reads?

We all do. This is not a problem; it's a part of learning. If the mistake doesn't interfere with understanding the story, just go on. If it's a mistake that will make the story confusing, gently say the correct word and go on. Your child may realize the mistake or maybe not. The main thing is to continue enjoying the story.

. . . I make mistakes when I read?

All adults make mistakes when they read. We do it more often than we think, but it usually isn't a problem. Your child is usually not listening carefully to every word, they just want to know the story. If your child says, "That's not what it says!" Say "Oops! Well, what *does* it say?" and go on. Your child will learn from you that reading is not about being perfect, it's about finding out what's going on in a book!

. . . I don't know what a word means or I can't answer my child's question?

This will happen as the books you read with your child get more difficult. Sometimes there are words in children's books which the author made up and you might not know how to pronounce them or what they mean. Tell your child you don't know and then together try to think of what it might mean. If the book mentions something you don't know about but your child is interested in it, make it an adventure to find out with your child. Check it out online or go to the library. We all learn all the time, and the best learning is what we learn together.

. . . my child refuses to read?

Don't push her/him. Continue to model enjoyment of reading at home by reading yourself and talking about what you read, what you learned, and how much you enjoyed it. Just talking about one newspaper article which is interesting to you could get your child interested in reading again. Go to the library and bring home some new books with interesting pictures. Leave them out where your child can see them. Pretty soon she/he will be asking you to read them together.

. . . my child wants to read alone?

This is fine. Eventually every child will be less interested in reading together and will want to go on at her/his own speed. It's part of the process of learning to read and learning to be independent. Respect your child's need for privacy. Make a quiet, comfortable place for reading. Continue reading on your own, talk about what you read, and ask your child about what they are reading.

. . . my child has reading problems that don't go away?

Reading, like learning to talk or walk, happens at different times for different people. By age 5, however, most children are taking an active interest in books and learning from print. If you think something might be unusual, check with your child's doctor to see if they have some vision problems or other physical problems which interfere with reading. If not, discuss the situation with her/his teacher.

Part 4: I want to learn more!

What can I read if I want to read more about reading?

Your public library will have some good books about reading. Just ask the librarian. Librarians love to help!

For a very complete list of great books to read to children, see if you can find *"How to Get Your Child to Love Reading"* by Esme Raji Codell. She organizes all of the recommended books into categories so you can easily find books on the topics you and your child want to read.

Here are some interesting and helpful websites on reading.

Reading is Fundamental has a site with lots of ideas for family reading.
www.rif.org/parents/0_4.mspx

Reading Rockets: Launching Young Readers has some good ideas about talking with children about what you and they are reading.
www.readingrockets.org/articles/400

Thinkfinity has some games and songs to build reading skills.
www.thinkfinity.org/PreschoolReadingActivities.aspx

The King County, Washington, Library has a good list of skills children build by reading.
www.kcls.org/parents/kidsandreading/readytoread/literacyskills.cfm

The King County Library also has some great booklists.
www.kcls.org/parents/kidsandreading/readytoread/booklists.cfm

The US Department of Education has a couple of good brochures on reading.
(¡Tambien en Español!)
www.ed.gov/parents/read/resources/edpicks.jhtml

Where can I find good books to read to my child without spending a lot of money?

Lots of places!

Public libraries loan books for free – get a free library card for your child as soon as she/he is old enough to know what a library is for. Make it a big family event – Show your child that you're excited that she/he is old enough to have a library card!! Be sure to get one for yourself, and use it, so your child knows that you think reading is important too.

Garage sales and **thrift stores** often have children's books are very low prices, often less than a dollar for books in good condition. Make this a family expedition – hunting for books on weekends!

Public school libraries often have books for younger readers. If you have a child at an elementary school, check to see if they have books for the younger children in the family. Many books used in kindergarten and first grade are great for pre-school kids as well.

Check online – Some sites, such as the International Digital Children's Library, let you read full books right on their site for free.

How can I improve my own reading?

The good news is, just by reading to your child you'll improve your own reading. All the skills your child will learn are the skills adults use to read – predicting, summarizing, and thinking about what it means – whether you're reading a novel, a newspaper, or a magazine.

If you don't read much now, you can begin by reading anything you can. Start out by reading just a few minutes a day and gradually increase the time. Reading frequently is better than reading a lot all at one time and then not reading for a while. You can improve your reading also by reading a variety of things. If you normally read novels, read some non-fiction about science or local history. If you mostly read newspapers or magazines, ask your friends what they are reading and read that. You might not become a fan of whatever they are reading, but you will become a better reader.

If you have the time, your local community college or community center probably has classes in adult literacy that will help you get started.

Remember – Reading together is fun!

I hope this Guide has been helpful to you. Just taking a few minutes a day to read with your child will make a big difference in their life and in yours!

Reading With Your Child

- Invite your child to read with you every day! Reading together gives you time to be with each other and share the joy of books.
- Take a picture walk. Before you read the story, look at each picture. What do you think will be on the next page?
- Have fun and be silly! When reading aloud use different voices for the characters.
- Talk about the details in the pictures. It will help your child become a better reader.
- Have your child retell the story. When children can retell a story it helps them to really understand the meaning of the words.
- It's okay to read your child's favorite book over and over.

Happy Reading!

Based on information from the Family Reading Partnership:
http://www.familyreading.org/m-ideas.htm

Courtesy of the Tacoma Public Schools READY! Set, Read! Program