

Reading and Relationships

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Once upon a time, a grandmother was visiting her grown son's home and brought his favorite childhood books along. Each afternoon of her week-long stay, she pulled out her satchel of family favorites. It was the cranky hour, right before mom and dad came home from work and about the time her four year old granddaughter, Emily, lost the excitement of her sister Erin's return from first grade.

"You like cats, don't you, Emily?" Grandma would begin. "Well, you'll like this little story I used to read to your dad about kittens." An inviting picture on the tattered cover drew the child to her. Soon they were investigating pictures, guessing at plots, and talking about cats past, present, and future.

The next day, Emily drew a picture of the kittens and helped her grandmother make a

birthday cake for her pet, Fluff. Dad remembered the good times and great adventures of the books in his boyhood. Mom noted how Grandma's stories seemed to calm the children and focus their attention on creative activities. When Grandma went back home, the family began to read some of the old classics and even bought a few new books.

After a short time, Erin's teacher remarked about improvements in the child's language and attention span. Mom and Dad noted, with a sigh of relief, that bedtimes were easier when preceded by a story. The girls watched less television. Of course, things didn't always happen happily ever after, but even the bad times were resolved and forgotten when puppets talked out the family's problems, or when Mom, Dad, Erin, and Emily became hilariously lost in their favorite book of silly poems.

“It is being included in talk, and being treated like a competent language partner that makes the difference.”

-Judith Schickedanz

Literacy activities (reading, writing, storytelling, illustration) are among the most important contributions adults can make to the lives of children. Reading together, storytelling, and encouraging expressions such as drawing and creative writing are also excellent activities for building personal skills and family closeness.

To select appropriate materials and activities, some knowledge of a child’s development is useful.

Milestones of development in young children

Note: These patterns are typical but may be slower in some children.

0-12 months By 2-3 months, child can raise his or her head with some control and can focus on objects. At 3-6 months old, child is capable of listening attentively, and being verbal (“da-da,” “ma-ma”). Reaching, grasping, and crawling promote discovery and interaction.

12-18 months Older infants copy expressions, understand, speak many words, and name objects. Pretend play begins with familiar objects and puppets. A child is interested in simple stories and recognizes television characters.

18-36 months Language skills increase rapidly as exploration and pretend play expand, object names are learned, and phrases are strung into sentences. The child asks questions constantly.

3-4 years Child has extensive curiosity and explores surroundings, especially real-life objects and experiences. More social play and rule/ritual learning are present. Child is beginning to connect sounds with words and sentences, make distinctions between formal (book) and informal (talk) language, and learn grammar (plurals, tense, pronoun use) slowly but surely. Children broaden their enjoyment of music and begin to recognize and use humor with peers and adults.

4-5 years Child has better mastery of physical skills. Diction, or pronunciation of words, is clearer and imagination is complex, with fantasy sometimes blurring reality. Conversation skills and interest in stories increase.

Four factors typical of early reader’s home environment:

- Parents and children typically read on both an individual basis and as a family.
- A wide variety of printed material is in the home.
- Paper and pencil are readily available to the child.
- Adults show support by answering questions, praising reading and writing, taking the child to the library, buying books, writing down stories dictated by the child, and displaying the child’s work.

Activities that build reading and relationships

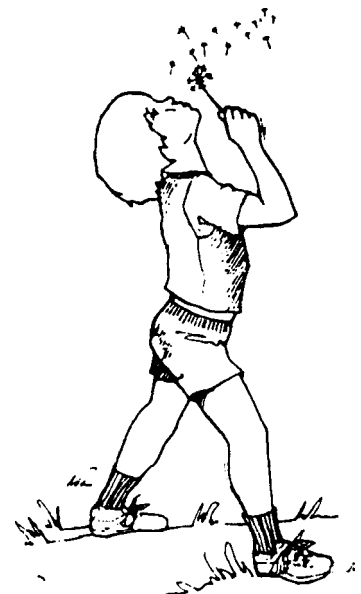
Many events related to language development also build confidence and caring. For preschoolers, simply enjoying books, signs, songs, and everyday events together teaches more than formal drill on alphabet, word recognition, or phonics. By matching activities to the child's level and interest, adults can create enjoyable and meaningful times for the entire family. Some events that work well, by age, are:

Infants View colorful pictures
Read or listen to rhymes, songs, and simple stories
Allow child to view or handle stiff cardboard or firm vinyl picture books
Read books with or about noises.
Talk and respond to the child's babbling, cooing, and words
Repeat songs and rhymes to child

Toddlers Allow child to fill in words during reading aloud
Tell, or allow child to tell you, stories
Read stories about how things work
Encourage drawing and scribbling
Read familiar, predictable stories over and over

Three Year Olds Listen to child's description of everyday events
Expect child to focus on story motive and details
Take the child to the library; let him/her choose a book
Let child recognize and repeat familiar stories
Sing songs, play with puppets
Ask thought-provoking questions

Four Year Olds Include language (recognizing and writing simple words) in pretend play, shopping, cooking, games, card-making, and other activities
Create a bookcase and book corner
Allow child to describe the viewpoints of characters in literature
Read aloud stories longer than 10-12 pages in length
Repeat rhymes and alphabet songs
Develop a scrapbook or hobby
Exchange ideas with the child's preschool teacher



Tips to build reading and relationships

1. Model reading with a variety of material (fiction, newspapers, recipes, magazines, etc.).
2. Use labels and signs around the home.
3. Point out familiar words around home and community for a child to recognize.
4. Take at least 10 minutes a day to read aloud as a family. Let each person choose stories.
5. Visit the library or buy books once a week.
6. Keep a book in the child's car seat.
7. Encourage preschoolers to tell you the story in a familiar book in order to develop imagination and memory.
8. Use rhymes and songs to help teach family rules and distract or encourage children through difficult times.
9. Work together to draw and write about shared experiences (re-read frequently).
10. Let the children choose their own books, telling or dictating stories they enjoy. Avoid pushing young children to learn the alphabet or learn to read by themselves.

Following up on reading

Point out print in the child's environment and praise their awareness of words around them.

Use puppets, stuffed animals, or play to dramatize, invent stories, or talk out problems.

Talk about daily events or trips to special places, illustrating them with drawings, photos, and pictures.

Take time out for jokes, pranks, and silly poems that 'play on words.'

Teaching your child to think: Generating questions

Asking questions works best after reading together.

Ask questions that require reporting on present and past experiences.

Details: Who? What? How many? What is...?

Can you remember?

Sequence: What happened first, next, last?

Compare: How are character settings, plots, and story themes alike and different?

Analyze: Explain or classify events and experiences in the book.

Reflect: Retell and talk about emotional and intellectual reactions. Act it out.

Ask questions that require logical reasoning.

Process: How did things happen? How else could they have happened?

Relationships: What caused events to happen?

Problems and solutions: What was the problem? How was it solved?

Justify: What do you think about the story? Why? Is it good? Wrong?

Draw Conclusions: Explain how you connect events.

Experiment with predicting and projecting during and after reading.

What do you think a character should have done?

What do you think will happen? What could be done?

How could character(s) solve problems?

How would you feel? What would you do?

Stretch your child's imagination.

Can you think of another adventure?

What else might happen? What would you do?

How might a character from another book act in this one?

What to read

To Infants:

2 - 6 months

A.A. Milne: *Baby's First Golden Book*
Series: *Little animal friends, What does baby see?, Play with me, and Winnie the Pooh's rhymes*

D. Bruna: *My Toys*

K. Choraio: *The Baby's Lap Book, Looking at Animals*

6- 12 months

Molly Bang: *Ten, Nine, Eight Book of Nursery and Mother Goose Rhymes* (illust. Briggs)

D. Bruna: *B is for Bear*

B. Gillham: *The First Words Picture Book*

Eric Hill: *Where's Spot?*, other *Spot* books

Tonya Hoban: *Is it Red, Is it Yellow, Is it Blue?*

Gyo Fujikawa: *Let's Eat, Can You Count?*

Gunilla Wolde: *Fit It*

J.P. Miller: *The Cow Says Moo, Mother Goose Treasury* (illust. by Briggs), and *My House Golden book*

Peggy Parish: *I Can, Can You? Sesame Street: Ernie and Bert Can, Can you?*

12 - 24 months

Margaret Wise Brown: *Goodnight Moon*

J. Burningham: *The Blanket*

Eric Carle: *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*

D. Freeman: *Corduroy*

E.J. Keats: *The Snowy Day*

Richard Scarry: *Best Word Book Ever*

To Preschoolers:

Verna Aardema: *Why Mosquitos Buzz in People's Ears*

Molly Bang: *The Paper Crane*

Marsha Brown: *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*

Beatrice DeRegniers: *May I Bring a Friend?*

Tommy dePaola: *Now One Foot, Now the Other*

Ed Emberley: *Drummer Hoff*

I. Friedman: *How My Parents Learned to Eat*

Wanda Gag: *Millions of Cats*

Paul Gobel: *Dream Wolf*

Ruth Heller: *Chickens Aren't the Only Ones, Plants that Never Ever Bloom*

Thatcher Hurd: *Mama Don't Allow*

Nurit Karlin: *The Tooth Witch*

Jack Kent: *The Caterpillar and the Polliwog*

G. Kredenser and S. Mack: *One Dancing Drum*

L. Rankin: *The Handmade Alphabet*

Maurice Sendak: *Where the Wild Things Are*

Peter Spier: *Gobble, Growl, Grunt*

Alexi Tolstoy: *The Great Big Enormous Turnip*

Audrey Wood: *The Napping House*

Brian Wildsmith: *Brian Wildsmith's ABC*

Vera B. Williams: *Music, Music for Everyone, and A Chair for My Mother*

Margot Zemach: *It Could Always be Worse*

To Kindergarteners:

Janet & Allan Ahlberg: *The Jolly Postman*

Frank Asch: *Bear Shadow*

Molly Bang: *Wiley and the Hairy Man*

Graeme Base: *The Eleventh Hour*

Michael Bond & Fred Branberry:
Paddington Bear

Jan Brett: *The Mitten*

Mary Calhoun: *Hot Air Henry, Cross Country Cat*

To Kindergarteners, (continued):

Carmen Agra Deedy: *Agatha's Feather Bed*

Russell Hoban: *Frances* books

Edward Lear & Jan Brett: *The Owl and the Pussycat*

Arnold Lobel: *Fables, Frog and Toad Together*

Bill Martin, Jr. & John Archambault: *Knots on a Counting Rope, Fire! Fire!*

Robert McCloskey: *Blueberries for Sal*

Inga Moore: *Six Dinner Sid*

John Norris Wood & Mark Harrison: *Nature Hide and Seek.* and *Oceans and Jungles*

Susan Pearson & John Wallner: *My Favorite Time of Year*

Patricia Polacco: *Rechenka's Eggs*

H.A. Rey: *Curious George* books

Anne Kent Rush: *Greta Bear Goes to Yellowstone National Park*

Jon Schieszka: *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs,* and *The Frog Prince Continued*

Maurice Sendak: *Pierre*

Diane Siebert: *Mojave*

Shel Silverstein: *The Giving Tree, Where the Sidewalk Ends*

Judith Viorst: *The Tenth Good Thing About Barney, Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No-Good, Very-Bad Day*

E.B. White: *Charlotte's Web*

Jane Yolen: *Owl Moon*

Charlotte Zolotow: *William's Doll*

Bernice Cullinan. (1992). *Read to Me. Raising Kids Who Love to Read.* New York: Scholastic.

Ruth Graves. (Ed., 1988). *The Reading Is Fundamental Guide to Encouraging Young Readers.* New York: Doubleday.

Judith A. Schickedanz. (1986). *More Than the ABCs. The Early Stages of Reading and Writing* Washington, DC: National Association on the Education of Young Children.

Dorothy S. Strickland & Lesley Mandel Monroe (1989). *Emerging Literacy. Young Children Learn to Read and Write.* Washington, DC: National Association on the Education of Young Children.

Recommended books for learning about reading and relationships:

Bernice Cullinan and Brod Bagert. (1993). *Helping Your Child Learn to Read.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. (Available through Consumer Information Center, Pueblo, CO 81009.

Charles A. Smith. (1981). *Once Upon a Mind.* Manhattan, KS: Kansas State University Cooperative Extension Service.

Jim Trelease. (1989). *The New Read-Aloud Handbook.* New York, NY: Penguin Books.

D. Taylor & D.S. Strickland. (1986). *Family Storybook Reading.* Portsmouth: Heineman.

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Dorothy Butler. (1985). *Babies Need Books.* New York: Atheneum.

Consultants on Content: Margaret Cooney, College of Education, and Karen Williams, College of Agriculture, University of Wyoming reviewers: Christine Pasley, Platte Co. Extension Educator; Charles Smith, Kansas State University Human Development Specialist; Diana DelCampo, New Mexico State University Child Development and Family Specialist

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