

BIRTH THROUGH PRESCHOOL

A Child Becomes a Reader

PROVEN IDEAS FROM RESEARCH FOR PARENTS

*Produced for the National Institute for Literacy
by RMC Research Corporation, Portsmouth, New Hampshire*

Authors

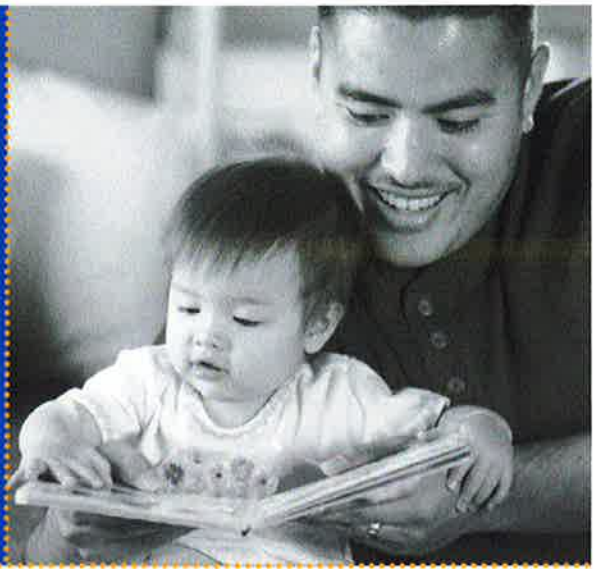
Bonnie B. Armbruster, Ph.D., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Fran Lehr, M.A., Lehr & Associates, Champaign, Illinois

Jean Osborn, M. Ed., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Infants and Toddlers

BIRTH THROUGH AGE 2



WHAT TO DO AT HOME

Talking to and reading to infants and toddlers are two good ways to prepare them for later success in reading.

Talk to your child

1. **Begin talking and singing to your child from birth.** Your baby loves hearing your voice. Play peek-a-boo and pat-a-cake. Recite nursery rhymes or other verses that have strong rhythms and repeated sounds. Sing lullabies and other songs.
2. **Let your baby know that you hear her babbles, coos, and gurgles.** Repeat the sounds she makes. Smile back. When you respond to her sounds, she learns that what she “says” means something and is important to you. Sometimes, you can supply the language for her.

PARENT TALK

When your baby stretches her arm toward her bottle and says, “ga-ga-ga,” say, “Oh, you’re ready for some more milk? Here’s your milk. Isn’t it good!”

3. **Play simple touching and talking games together.** These games help a child learn what different parts of the body are called.

PARENT TALK

Ask “Where are your toes?” Then touch your child’s toes and say, “Here are your toes!” Repeat several times, then switch to fingers or ears or eyes or the nose.

Read to your child

- 1. Make reading a pleasure.** Read to your child in a comfortable place. Have her sit on your lap or next to you so that she can see and point to the print and the pictures. Show her that reading is fun and rewarding.
- 2. Show enthusiasm as you read with your child.** Read the story with expression. Make it more interesting by talking as the characters would talk, making sound effects, and making expressions with your face and hands. When children enjoy being read to, they will grow to love books and be eager to learn to read them.
- 3. Read to your child often.** Set aside special times for reading each day, maybe after lunch and at bedtime. The more you can read to him, the better—as long as he is willing to listen. Reading times can be brief, about 5 to 10 minutes.

READING TOGETHER

Even six-week-old babies like the feeling of closeness when a parent, grandparent, or other caretaker reads to them. When children find out that reading with a loving adult can be a warm, happy experience, they begin to build a lifelong love of reading.

Reading aloud also helps children learn specific things about reading and words.

- **About books**—how to hold them. How to turn the pages one at a time. How books have words and pictures to help tell the story.
- **About print**—there is a difference between words and the pictures. You read words and look at pictures.
- **About words**—every word has a meaning. There are always new words to learn.
- **About book language**—sometimes book language sounds different from everyday conversation.
- **About the world**—there are objects, places, events, and situations that they have not heard about before.

GOOD BOOKS FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS

- Board books are made from heavy cardboard with a plastic coating. The pages are easy for very young children to turn. Board books are sturdy and can stand hard wear by babies, who tend to throw them, crawl over them, and chew them. Board books can be wiped clean.
- Cloth books, which are printed on cloth, are soft, strong, and washable.
- Touch-and-feel books invite children to explore them with their fingers. They contain objects with different textures or contain holes or pages of different shapes.
- Interactive books have flaps that lift or other parts that move. Toddlers love them, but these books tend not to hold up well under rough treatment.
- Books with interesting language, rhythm, and sounds such as books with rhymes, songs, and poetry.
- Books with predictable patterns and repeated language such as those that retell traditional nursery rhymes or songs.

4. **Talk with your child as you read together.** Comment about what's happening in the story. Point to pictures and talk about what's happening in them. When your child is ready, have him tell you about the pictures.

PARENT TALK

"See the cat under the tree?"

"Look, the family is getting into a car. I wonder where they're going?"

"What's happening on this page?"

5. **Encourage your child to explore books.** Give your baby sturdy books to look at, touch, and hold. Allow her to turn the pages, look through the holes, or lift the flaps. As your child grows older, keep books on low shelves or in baskets where she can see them and get them herself. Encourage her to look through the books and talk about them. She may talk about the pictures. She may "pretend" to read a book that she has heard many times. Or, she may **pretend read** based only on the pictures.
6. **Read favorite books again and again.** Your child will probably ask you to read favorite books many times. You might get tired of reading the same books, but children love hearing the same stories again. And it helps them learn to read by hearing familiar words and seeing what they look like in print.

Preschoolers

AGES 3 AND 4



At ages 3 and 4, children are growing rapidly in their language use and in their knowledge of reading and writing. They are learning the meanings of many new words, and they are beginning to use words in more complicated sentences when they speak. They know more about books and print. They are eager to write. They may even be showing an interest in learning to read.

Many three- and four-year-old children attend day care centers or preschool for part or most of the day. The information in this section of the booklet will help you and your child, whether your child stays at home all day or attends a day care center or preschool.

WHAT TO DO AT HOME

Continue to talk and read with your child, as you did when he was an infant and toddler. Also, add some new and more challenging activities.

Talk and listen

- 1. When you do something together—eating, shopping, taking a walk, visiting a relative—talk about it.**
- 2. Take your child to new places and introduce him to new experiences.** Talk about the new, interesting, and unusual things that you see and do.
- 3. Teach your child the meaning of new words.** Say the names of things around the house. Label and talk about things in pictures. Explain, in simple ways, how to use familiar objects and how they work.

PARENT TALK

*"That's a whale! It's a great big animal, as big as a truck.
It lives in the ocean."*

*"This is a vacuum cleaner. We use it to clean the floor.
See how it cleans up the spilled cereal?"*

4. **Help your child to follow directions.** Use short, clear sentences to tell him what you want him to do.

PARENT TALK

"Give me your hand, please."

"Please take off your mittens and put them on the table. Then I'd like for you to bring me your jacket so that I can hang it up."

5. **Play with words.** Have fun with tongue twisters such as "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers" and nonsense rhymes such as "Hey Diddle, Diddle," as well as more modern nonsense rhymes.

Read together

1. **Keep reading to your child.** Read her a lot of different kinds of books. Reread her favorite books, even if you get tired of them before she does.
2. **Read predictable books.** Your child will begin to recognize the repeated words and phrases and have fun saying them with you.
3. **Read poetry and other rhyming books to your child.** When reading a familiar rhyme, stop before a rhyming word and ask your child to provide the word.
4. **Ask your child what she thinks will happen next in a story.** Get excited when she finds out whether her guess was right.
5. **Talk about books.** Ask about favorite parts. Help your child relate the story to his own life. Answer his questions about characters or events.
6. **Build a library, or book collection, for your child.** Look for books at bookstores, garage sales, used bookstores, and sales at the library. Suggest that people give books to your child as birthday gifts and on other special days.

Teach about print and letters

1. **Help your child learn to recognize her name in print.** As she watches, print the letters of her name, saying each letter as you write it. Display her name in special places in your home. Encourage her to spell and write her name.
2. **Point out words and letters everywhere you can.** Read street signs, traffic signs, billboards, and store signs. Point out certain letters in these signs. Ask your child to begin naming common signs and find some letters.
3. **Teach your child the alphabet song.**
4. **Share alphabet books with your child.** Some alphabet books have songs and games that you can learn together.
5. **Put magnetic letters on your refrigerator or other smooth, safe metal surface.** Ask your child to name the letters as he plays with them.

- 6. *Play games using the alphabet.*** Ask your child to find letters in books, magazines, newspapers, and other print.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN DAY CARE CENTERS AND PRESCHOOLS

If your child attends a day care center or preschool, look for these important characteristics of teachers, classrooms, and instruction.

Teachers

In quality day care centers and preschools, teachers:

- Keep a well-run, orderly classroom that also encourages children to participate in and enjoy learning
- Use many creative ways to help children learn language and learn the knowledge and skills that will help them become readers

Classrooms

In quality day care centers and preschools, classrooms have:

- Lots of books and magazines that children can handle and play with
- Areas for many different activities, such as art, science, housekeeping, writing, and perhaps computers
- Plenty of print on labels, signs, and posters
- Writing materials, including paper, pencils, crayons, and markers
- Magnetic letters, or letters made of foam, plastic, wood, or other durable material so children can pretend write and play

Instruction

In quality day care centers and preschools, teachers:

- Read aloud to children frequently, from many different kinds of books
- Talk with children throughout the day and listen carefully to what they say
- Play games such as "Simon Says" and "Mother, May I?" that require children to listen carefully
- Give children opportunities to build their knowledge by exploring their interests and ideas
- Help children learn the meanings of new words by naming colors, shapes, animals, familiar objects, and parts of the classroom
- Teach about the sounds of spoken language by reading aloud books with interesting sounds, chanting, and rhyming; by having children say or sing nursery rhymes and songs; and by playing word games
- Teach children about print by pointing out and using the print that is all around them
- Teach the letters of the alphabet
- Encourage children to scribble, draw, and try to write

WHAT CHILDREN SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO BY AGE 5

The following is a list of some accomplishments that you can expect for your child by age 5. This list is based on research in the fields of reading, early childhood education, and child development. Remember, though, that children don't develop and learn at the same pace and in the same way. Your child may be more advanced or need more help than others in her age group. You are, of course, the best judge of your child's abilities and needs. You should take the accomplishments as guidelines and not as hard-and-fast rules.

Spoken language

A five-year-old child:

- Understands and follows oral (or spoken) directions
- Uses new words and longer sentences when she speaks
- Recognizes the beginning sounds of words and sounds that rhyme
- Listens carefully when books are read aloud

Reading

A five-year-old child:

- Shows interest in books and reading
- Might try to read, calling attention to himself and showing pride in what he can do ("See, I can read this book!")
- Can follow the series of events in some stories
- Can connect what happens in books to her life and experiences
- Asks questions and makes comments that show he understands the book he is listening to

Print and letters

A five-year-old child:

- Knows the difference between print (words) and pictures and knows that print is what you read
- Recognizes print around him on signs, on television, on boxes, and many other places
- Understands that writing has a lot of different purposes (for example, signs tell where something is located, lists can be used for grocery shopping, directions can tell you how to put something together)
- Knows that each letter in the alphabet has a name
- Can name at least 10 letters in the alphabet, especially the ones in her name
- "Writes," or scribbles, messages

The main sources for this list of accomplishments are Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children and Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children. For more information about these sources, see Bibliography at the end of this booklet.