

Building Readers®

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

SETA Head Start
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Language-learning success is built on casual conversation

You may already know that talking with your child is a wonderful way to build his vocabulary. But do you know how to make the most of those chats?

To get the biggest “bang for your buck” out of conversations with your preschooler:

- **Encourage him to speak.** Show that you care about what he says.
- **Have him take the lead.** Let your child’s comments steer the direction of your chat. Talk about his interests—not yours.
- **Don’t correct his language.** Instead, model proper grammar when responding. “I goed with Grandma.” “You went with her?”
- **Introduce new words.** If he says, “I saw a really big truck today!” try saying, “Wow! You saw an *enormous* truck?”

Source: Linda K. Rath, Ed.D. and Louise Kennedy, *The Between the Lions Book for Parents*, ISBN: 0-0605-1028-5 (HarperCollins, www.harpercollins.com).

*“To learn to read is to light a fire;
every syllable that is spelled out is a spark.”*

—Victor Hugo, *Les Miserables*



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Props help bring books to life



Who says you have to stick to the book when reading aloud? To make story time even more thrilling for your child, think “off the page” by:

- **Breaking out the props.** Use finger puppets or shadow animals to hold her attention.
- **Slipping into costume.** Is the prince about to rescue Rapunzel? Don your longest wig (or pile yarn on your head) and get into character!

Share magazines with kids



Use magazines to add variety to the things you read with your child. Look at the pictures together. Ask your child what he sees in them. Explain how the pictures relate to the articles in the magazine. Have your child find words that begin with different letters. Point out familiar words together.

Spinner game can improve letter recognition

For a new way to help your child learn the alphabet, try playing a spinner game together. Here’s how:

- **Draw a circle** on a square piece of poster board.
- **Cut out an arrow** for a spinner and attach it to the circle’s center so that it can spin.
- **Divide the circle** into eight spaces, like a pie. Label each space with a different letter of the alphabet.
- **Write each letter** on its own index card, too.
- **Ask your child** to spin the arrow and say the letter it points to. Then have her select the card that matches it.

When your child masters these eight letters, make a new spinner and cards with eight more letters.

Source: Mary Weaver, *365 Fun-Filled Learning Activities*, ISBN: 1-58062-127-9 (Adams Media Corporation, www.adamsmedia.com).

Questions teach tricky tenses



Boost your preschooler’s language skills and time sense by teaching her about *past*, *present* and *future*. During the day, talk about your activities. Ask questions like:

- “**What will** we do if it rains tomorrow?”
- “**What was** something fun we did this morning?”
- “**What are** we reading now?”

Source: “Activities to Help Your Child Learn About Language,” America Reads Challenge—Ready*Set*Read: Early Childhood Growth Chart, U.S. Department of Education, www.ed.gov/Family/GrowthChart/page2.html.

Develop your preschooler's listening skills

Good listening skills aren't just important when it comes to reading (although they're critical for helping your child decipher the sounds letters make). They're also vital at home. After all, the fewer times you have to repeat yourself to your child, the happier everyone will be. (And the less likely you'll be to pull your hair out in frustration!)

To encourage your child to become a better listener:

- **Don't yell.** When you scream, your child doesn't hear your words. He only hears the volume.
- **Get his attention first.** Then begin speaking.
- **Keep it simple.** Don't ramble. Just get to the point.

Source: "Getting Your Children to Listen to You," Parenting Center: Kids and Listening, Discovery Health, <http://health.discovery.com/centers/kids/childrearingtips/listen.html>.

Boost that love of books with family reading rituals

Create reading traditions with your family and you can enjoy them for years to come! Clever ones to try include:

- **Breakfast with Books.**

Who says cereal is the only thing that belongs on the breakfast table? Set out some books to share, too. It's an easy way to sneak in some reading time with your child before she heads to preschool.

- **Pack a Story Picnic.** Lots of kids' books feature food. So find a great one (like Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*) and tuck it alongside the sandwiches as



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you head out for a picnic. If you're not sure about which titles to choose, ask your librarian for suggestions.

Source: "Family Reading Traditions," Family Reading Partnership, www.familyreading.org/i-traditions.htm.



Q: My preschooler's teacher asks parents to send the children to class "ready to learn." But what does that mean?

A: For preschoolers, being "ready to learn" includes getting enough sleep, eating a healthful breakfast and bringing the proper supplies to school. It also includes you being enthusiastic about school so he will be, too! By helping your child be "ready to learn," you're giving your child what he needs to do his best.

Do you have a question about reading? Email readingadvisor@parent-institute.com.



Books to delight your early reader

Oscar and the Bat: A Book About Sound by Geoff Waring (Candlewick Press). Critters in the meadow make lots of strange noises, and the curious little kitty can't wait to hear all of them!

Who Wants to Be a Poodle: I Don't by Lauren Child (Candlewick Press). Trixie Twinkle Toes gets poofed and pampered and primped—and hates it. The spunky pup wants to be *daring*, not *dainty*!

Turtle's Penguin Day by Valeri Gorbachev (Knopf Books for Young Readers). Father Turtle reads Little Turtle a bedtime story about penguins. Can Little Turtle become a penguin with the help of his grandfather's black jacket and red slippers? What will his teacher and classmates think?

Has your child reached these reading milestones?



Preschoolers are learning every day. By the time they reach kindergarten, most children:

- **Can play** rhyming games and understand rhymes.
- **Know that** printed words run left to right, top to bottom.
- **Can predict** what will happen next in stories.
- **Are able** to retell familiar tales.

If your youngster can't do these things, don't panic. But do speak to her pediatrician or preschool teacher if you have concerns.

Source: "Reading Milestones," KidsHealth, http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/all_reading/milestones.html#.

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