

A Parent's Guide to Helping Your Child Learn to Read

This guide was developed to provide parents with information they can use to help their children become successful readers.

Every parent wants his or her child to be a successful reader. Reading, after all, provides the foundation for a great education as well as a lifelong skill that brings not only knowledge, but pleasure.

Building on What We Know about Learning to Read

Research on reading and learning to read shows that there are things that can be done at home from an early age that help children become successful as readers. The following suggestions, which are backed up by research, should be especially helpful to parents and caregivers of young children.

- **Teaching young children to recognize the letters of the alphabet is a big boost to reading readiness.** Recognizing alphabet letters is one of the single strongest predictors of reading success for young children entering school. Alphabet recognition lays a critical foundation for learning to read and write.
- **Reading to children helps them to understand about books and print.** Children need to understand that print carries a meaningful message and that stories have a structure. By hearing many stories read to them, and by discussing those stories, children learn that a story has a beginning, a middle, and an end; it has characters, setting, and plot. Children who have had exposure to many children's books can usually indicate when a story does not "make sense" even if they can't say that it has no plot. Through reading to children, parents can help them understand that there is a connection between the words on the page and what they hear as a story is read to them.
- **Talking with your child about a book or story helps him develop vocabulary.** As a child learns to speak, he also learns how to listen. He begins to understand how words are strung together to make sense, the patterns of language, and the ways language changes when used for different purposes such as giving directions, explaining, or entertaining.
- **Reading about the familiar helps children relate to what is being read to them.** Beginning readers will have a hard time understanding what they read if they have no experiences to which they can connect the words. For example, it is difficult for a child who has never seen snow to understand a story about the hazards of traveling in a blizzard.
- **Showing the relationship between writing and reading is another way to build reading skill.** Helping children learn to write their name, compose notes to friends and family members, and copy favorite words are all ways that parents can help children develop understanding and skills in writing that transfer to reading.

Some Simple Ways to Build a Reading Foundation for Your Child

- Label things in the home such as the table, the refrigerator, doors, etc. Collect the labels and have your child put them back on the correct objects.
- While in the car, walking, or riding the bus, have the child look for and read familiar signs.
- Talk to children about what they like to do— their favorite games, pastimes, and books.
- Listen to your child's stories, accounts of events, and ideas.
- Make plans for the day with your child. As children get older, plans can be written in a short schedule. The schedule can be used to search for familiar words and to learn new words.
- Encourage your child to ask questions. Show how some questions can be answered by looking for information in books.

Ways to Help Your Child Develop Vocabulary and Concepts

Talk about new words the child hears and connect them to words the child already knows.

- Look for letters of the alphabet in signs on a trip.
- Play the game, I see something..., where one person describes an object in view and the other(s) must guess what it is.
- Help children make connections among words or concepts such as “winter–cold, snow-holidays;” or “dinner–food, family-evening.”

Ways to Talk with Your Child about Books

- Ask your child to predict what might happen next while reading a story. Be sure to ask your child to give reasons for the prediction.
- Ask your child why a character might have taken a specific action. Again, ask for the reasons behind the answer.
- Ask your child to compare a book to another familiar book. How are the characters alike or different? Do the stories take place in similar places? How are the illustrations similar or different?
- Ask what part of the story the child liked best and why.
- Ask whether the child liked the ending of the story and why or why not.

Ways to Help Your Child Connect Reading and Writing

- Encourage your child to draw pictures about books or experiences. Drawing is a preparation for writing because it develops both the muscles needed for writing and children’s ability to represent their ideas.
- Show your child how to write her name.
- Help your child to compose a note to a relative or friend. Have your child dictate as you write. Read the note back to the child pointing to the words as you read them. Older children can look for familiar words in the note.

Read Across America: A Year Round Celebration!

Be sure to check out MEA’s web site at www.maine.nea.org/dir4/Read_Across.htm for current information on Read Across America plus valuable links to help you help your child to keep the joy in reading.

Other brochures in this series:

- *A Parent’s Guide to School Involvement*
- *A Parent’s Guide to Supporting School Success*
- *A Parent’s Guide to Raising Readers and Keeping Them That Way*
- *A Parent’s Guide to Testing at Your Child’s School*
- *A Parent’s Guide to Helping Your Child with Today’s Math*
- *A Parent’s Guide to Raising Scientifically Literate Children*
- *How to Help Your Child Get the Most Out of Homework*