

Getting a Jump on Literacy

Reading doesn't just happen automatically for every youngster. And while the jury's still out on how young is too young to get started, here are 10 things parents can do to get the ball rolling:

1 **Talk with your kids:** Children pick up quickly on the sounds and rhythms of language. Keep the banter going. It will help them grasp the rudiments of conversation.

- Provide a running commentary on both your activities and your child's.
- Follow up on what your child says.
- Recite rhymes, repeating your child's favorites.

2 **Read with them every day:** Reading to kids boosts their knowledge and vocabulary. It introduces them to the mechanics of literacy—like turning pages and reading from left to right.

- Pick a regular reading time when stories can be enjoyed at a relaxed, unhurried pace.
- Take books along on errands.
- Make sure Mom's not doing all the work. Boys who associate reading with women might dismiss it as a "girl thing."

3 **Choose your books wisely:** Find books on subjects that interest them—they'll enjoy reading more.

- Get them involved in choosing their books.



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- Find books related to current events in their lives, such as on starting school or about a recent vacation destination.

4 Surround your child with books:

Children love having familiar stories nearby that they can go back to again and again.

- You can find cheap, used books at yard sales, thrift stores and library sales.
- Consider subscribing to a children's magazine. This way your child has something to look forward to in the mail every month.
- Make sure they see you reading.

5 **Slow down and enjoy reading aloud:** Don't just drone along. Kids pick up on boredom and lose

interest quickly. Add some drama to your voice, act out different characters and put yourself into the story.

- Pose questions about the story, and follow up on theirs.
- Pause here and there so kids have time to take things in.

6 **Read stories over and over:** It takes a long time for kids to take it all in, and they love familiar stories where they know what's coming next.

- Tape yourself reading your child's favorite stories so kids can hear them when they want.

7 **Foster their awareness of letters and print:**

Point out familiar letters in their everyday lives, such as the "S" in "Sesame Street."

- Buy them plastic letters to play with or make some.
- Write their names on possessions like lunchboxes.
- Give them writing supplies when they play games like house or hospital.

8 Surround them with writing

tools: All kids like having a varied supply at their disposal.

- Provide them with different kinds of papers, as well as markers, crayons and pens.
- Encourage kids to tell you stories, write them down, then read them back to them.

9 Don't pressure them:

Nagging your kids about what they read may turn them off to reading in general.

- Comic books and sports magazines are better than no reading material at all.
- Agree to take turns in choosing their bedtime stories.
- Ask your

librarian for books that are both entertaining and educational.

10 Show your appreciation:

Nothing encourages good reading habits like positive reinforcement.

- Display your child's writing in prominent places, such as the refrigerator door.
- Don't jump on every mistake a child makes while reading aloud, especially if it doesn't change the gist of the story.
- Talk with your kids about what they are reading and writing in school.

SOURCES: NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN, INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION. TEXT BY JOSH ULICK.

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