

*Giving Your child the Gift of Reading*

# *A Guide to Teaching Your Child to Read*



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# Introduction

Children are born ready and eager to learn. They are naturally curious about everything around them, and from the moment that they are born, a lifelong process of learning begins. Probably the most remarkable is the development of the child's brain. Learning to crawl, walk, speak, laugh, and feel sad are all part of the brain development process. It goes without saying that loving care and interactions of parents and caregivers leads to healthy brain development - bonding, talking, singing, reading, and playing are some of the most key activities. These everyday moments of simple, but loving interactions provide essential nourishment. A child's early experiences greatly influence how the brain grows and develops.

Learning is a process that begins at birth, and continues throughout life. However, the brain absorbs new information more easily and readily in earlier years of life. Young children learn easily their

native language simply with regular exposure. Learning never stops; however, later learning is usually slower, and more difficult - just think of when an adult is trying to learn a second language. Because of the great learning advantages in early years of development, it is best to provide children with the best opportunities for learning during their early years when their brain is most ready to absorb new information, acquire new knowledge, and learn new skills.

Children learn best simply through everyday experiences, and more importantly, when learning is fun. Forcing learning upon your child is a surefire way to turn them off from learning. Make learning a fun and rewarding process, and always remember that different children will develop and learn at different paces. Keep things simple and fun, and make learning activities part of the loving relationship you share with your child.

# The ABC's of Reading

When does a child learn to read? Most might say kindergarten or grade one; however, I can tell you that a child that can speak, can be taught to read, even as young as age two, as I have done for my daughter when she was two and a half years old. I do not put much weight in the argument that only exceptionally smart children can learn to read at a very young age, rather, that learning to read at a young age is the cause which leads to the effect of having exceptional intelligence later in life. As I write this, my son just turned one year old, and I have every expectation that he will learn to read at a young age just as his sister did - when he is able to speak.

There is no shortage of studies which indicate that early parental involvement is critical in the development of children's reading ability. In a Canadian study conducted at the Carleton University

in Ottawa, researchers presented the findings of the final phase of a 5 year study with 168 middle and upper middle class children. This study examined the relations among early home literacy experiences, subsequent receptive language and emergent literacy skills, and reading achievement of the children. Results of this study demonstrated that a child's exposure to books was directly related to their development of vocabulary, listening, and comprehension skills. Furthermore, parental involvement in teaching children about reading and writing was related to the development of early literacy skills, and these early literacy skills directly predicted word reading at the end of grade one, and also indirectly predicted reading skills in grade three.

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How well a child responds to reading instruction is determined by that specific child and their level of maturity. There is no simple answer to determine how quickly a particular child learns to read. How well a child learns to read will also depend on the relationship established with the parent.

Children begin to learn about language very early on, starting from the very first sounds they hear. They respond to family talking and singing, and quickly begin to understand speech although they still cannot talk yet. Their earliest experience with written language usually comes when the parent or caregiver begins to read stories to them. A healthy growing environment with ample talking, singing, reading, and exposure to books will help to set the stage for children to become successful readers. Teaching your child to read early on will help them achieve a richer vocabulary, and be able to speak more clearly and more coherently.

Children should be seen and heard. They should listen and speak often, and you should engage them in conversations to encourage them to speak. By the time a child is one year old, they have already learned a lot about spoken language simply through talking and listening.

### *Why is early reading so important?*

In today's schools, many children struggle with reading. Not because they lack the intelligence, nor because they have some reading disability. Rather, it is likely due to poor and inadequate reading instructions. Reading problems for children in

school can lead to long term consequences for their development of self-confidence, self-esteem, motivation to learn, and even affect their school performance. Reading achievement is critical to success in school, and reading difficulties will impact every facet of a child's academic performance. This is why early reading is so important.

Aside from academic performance, a child who has learned to read at an early age is able to enjoy and appreciate books of their own choice without being dependent on adults. This reinforces their self-confidence and self-reliance. Being able to read and comprehend what they are reading makes an exceptional alternative to sitting in front of the television. Watching too much TV can and most often do lead to the child relying on television as the main source of entertainment, and it becomes increasingly difficult to develop an interest for reading.

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Furthermore, our lives are surrounded by print, and the ability to read the signs, labels, postings and more, gives the child a wonderful ability to know what's happening around them, and to become more aware of their surroundings.

A child misses a golden opportunity to improve their development and enhance their academic performance when they are not taught to read at a young age before entering school, and their reading capabilities are left up to schools and the education system. I'm not saying that school education will not benefit a child's reading ability, far from it, rather, being able to read before entering school will further enhance the child's competence in learning to read and write English.

Children with reading difficulties face increased risk for other problems such as low self-esteem, emotional and behavioral problems, poor academic performance, and low achievements as adults. It is important to identify reading problems early on, and studies have shown that struggling readers who are identified early and taught with proper reading instructions can learn to read on grade level.

One study done at Georgia State University in Atlanta compared the effectiveness of reading

interventions in public schools. Here, 45 second grade children identified with reading disabilities were assigned to a 6 week phonological awareness, word analogy, or math training program. Their results found that children placed in the reading programs achieved significant gains in beginning reading skills. It is clear from studies like these that systematic, high quality reading intervention can help remediate reading disabilities in children. [2]

## What is Phonemic Awareness?

Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear, identify, think about, and work with the phonemes. Phonemic awareness is the basis for learning phonics. Phonemes are the smallest units of sound that work together to make up words. For example, separating the word BUS requires the phonemic awareness of knowing the three distinct phonemes, which are /B/, /U/, and /S/. Changing anyone of these phonemes also changes the word. For example, changing the last phoneme /S/ to /T/ changes the word BUS to BUT. As you probably know by now, a letter enclosed between the two slashes shows the phoneme, or the sound that the letter represents, and not the name of the letter itself.

According to the National Reading Panel, phonemic awareness improves children's word reading and reading comprehension, and it also helps children

learn to spell. Researchers have indicated that phonemic awareness has a direct correlation with students' ability to read as they get older, and it helps to build a foundation for children to understand the rules of the English language.

Studies have also found the phonological awareness skills can help children with speech disorders. In a UK follow up study done at the University of Manchester, 35 children with moderate to severe speech disorders participated in an earlier therapy research study between the ages of 3.6 and 5 years. A follow-up assessment of phonological awareness, speech, and early literacy were taken at age 6 to 7 years old for these same children. The study found that these children made good progress in speech, phonological awareness, and literacy development to an age appropriate level. The researchers also stated that phonological awareness at ages of 3 to 5 years were best predictors of literacy achievement. [3]

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Phonemic Awareness can be demonstrated by children in several ways including:

- Phonemic identity - being able to recognize common sounds in different words such as /p/ is the common sound for "pat", "pick", and "play".
- Phonemic isolation - being able to recognize the individual sounds of words such as /c/ is the beginning sound of "cat" and /t/ is the ending sound of "cat".
- Phoneme substitution - being able to change one word to another by substituting one phoneme. For example changing the /t/ in "cat" to /p/ now makes "cap".
- Word Segmenting - the parent says the word "lap", and the child says the individual sounds: /l/, /a/, and /p/.
- Oral blending - the parent says the individual sounds such as /r/, /e/, and /d/, and the child forms the word from the sounds to say "red".

Phonemic awareness and phonological awareness should be distinguished in the fact that they are not the same thing. Phonological awareness is broad in that it includes phonemic awareness as a sub category. Phonemic awareness is narrow, and its focus is on identifying and manipulating the individual sounds in words. Phonological awareness includes the identification and manipulation of larger parts of spoken language such as words syllables, onsets, and also phonemes.

## Teaching Your Child to Read

Learning to speak comes naturally to a child. Repeated exposure to sounds and speech from birth sets the stage for a child to naturally learn spoken language; however, reading doesn't come as naturally, which makes often, and early exposure to books highly beneficial. The process of learning to read is radically different from the process of learning to speak. English is an alphabetic language, using letters in writing to relate to sounds in the spoken language. Because of this, pre-literacy children need to develop an understanding of the individual sounds in the words, and this is not a simple process. English involves a complex system where, often, the same letter can have more than one sound.

At the time of early schooling, some children learn to read and even excel at reading, while other children may struggle. One important deciding factor is a child's exposure to language and books at a young age. Children with limited exposure to oral and written language are more likely to struggle in school than children who has a solid foundation in early reading and comprehension. As I've already said, with patience, a child who can speak, can learn to read, even at very young ages. This does not require superior intelligence on the part of the child, nor does it require an excessive effort on the part of the parents to teach the child. Rather, consistent, repetitive, piecemeal play-time instruction and some love and patience are all that's required. It really is that simple.

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When it comes to teaching your child to read, it must include three basic principles:

1) Reading for the child, whether it's a word, sentence, or story, must appeal to your child's interests.

2) Never pressure or force your child into reading, turning it into a negative "event" in their life. It should be a fun, enjoyable, and rewarding experience. This will take ample amounts of patience on the part of the parents, and some creativity.

3) Teaching your child to read must begin with the mastery of the phonemes - the individual sounds which makeup the words.

I can probably think of a few others that could go into that list, but these three are the most important to keep in mind. A child's natural urge to learn new things, love for stories, and desire to satisfy their curiosity, gives them a compelling desire to learn and master the individual letter sounds which form words. As your child gains proficiency with phonemes, they will naturally begin to sound out new words simply through the process of blending. This is a very natural progression, that you, as a parent and teacher, may at one point or another be surprised at the advancement of your child.

Young children have a short attention span, and this is even more so for very young children such as a two or three year old. Therefore, your aim should be to engage them often in short and brief "learning" sessions throughout the day. Each session should last just 2 to 5 minutes. For older children, depending on

their age and level of maturity, you can lengthen the sessions to 10 to 15 minutes. But always remember that this should never seem like a chore that turns the child off from reading. Typically, 10 to 15 minutes per day total spread across several sessions is more than sufficient to teach your child to read. You may be thinking: "can I really teach my child to read with just 15 minutes a day?" YES YOU CAN. The key is consistency and patience, and not trying to teach 30 minutes one day, and then doing nothing for another 3 days.

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### *Begin With Ear Training*

In our guide here, we'll cover one of the first essentials to teaching your child become a proficient reader, and that is ear training with blending. As mentioned earlier, one of the methods a child demonstrates phonemic awareness is with oral blending where the parent says the individual sounds such as /r/, /e/, and /d/, and the child forms the word from the sounds to say "red".

These blending sessions can be very short and brief, and you can do it as often as you like throughout the day. The key here is doing it often. Whether your child catches on to what you are trying to do is not important. What is important is that you keep at it, and keep playing the "blending game" with your child. The goal here is to help your child realize that words are made up of individual sounds, or phonemes, and by combining these sounds, you can form the words. Exactly how long it will take your child to realize the fact that the individual sounds make up words will vary depending on the child. It might take some children one day, one week, or even several weeks to grasp this concept, and you never really know the exact moment that the light switches on for them, but it will happen. Of course, this will be quicker for older children than younger children.

The basics of this exercise is to simply sound out words slowly and distinctly say the individual sounds of the word. There are several ways you can play the "blending game" with your child. You can play "figure out the word I'm saying" - where you say the phonemes of the word, and your child tries to form the word from the individual sounds. For example:

- Carl, what word am I trying to say: c-a-t. "CAT!" Carl answers. Now, what word am I saying: b-l-o-ck.

Or, you can simply work blended words into your everyday sentences. You do not need to do this to every single word you say to your child, or they might think that you're out of your mind. =) All you need to do, is pick out one word from your sentences and blend it. For example:

- Dan, come s-t-a-n-d up over here.
- Jesse drink your m-i-l-k.

Please note, I used hyphens instead of the slashes to denote the phonemes, which makes it a bit easier to read. So for "stand", instead of writing it as /s/, /t/, /a/, /n/, /d/, I write it simply as s-t-a-n-d, where you should pronounce the sound of each letter, instead of saying the name of each letter.

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Here are some other examples of what you can do with your child to practice blending:

- Kick your f-ee-t
- Touch your n-o-s-e
- J-u-m-p up and down
- H-o-p all around

- Clap your h-a-n-d-s
- Wave your a-r-m-s

As your child progress, you can slowly increase the difficulty. For example:

- K-i-c-k your f-ee-t
- T-o-u-ch your n-o-s-e
- J-u-m-p u-p and d-o-w-n
- H-o-p all around
- C-l-a-p your h-a-n-d-s
- W-a-ve your a-r-m-s

The next step in teaching your child to read is teaching the single consonant sounds and vowels, and teaching your children to recognize the individual sounds associated with each of the letters.

### *Final Words*

If you enjoyed the information we provided in this guide, and found it helpful, then you really need to see what we have in our complete teach your child to read program with simple and clear step-by-step instructions and prepared lessons that will take your child from whatever their current literacy level may

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## Notes

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