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Reading to Preschool Children

During the preschool years, children's brains are rapidly developing to take in new information about the world. Reading to children is a key part of this cognitive development and builds literacy skills, which include the ability to read, write, and learn.

In addition to helping children learn how to read and write, books can provide valuable lessons in social skills, such as through stories about how to interact with others. Books can provide lessons in understanding key concepts, such as opposites. Books can also provide valuable information about how the world works; examples include books about the seasons, other countries, or farm animals. Finally, children who are read to, especially before entering school, are more likely to experience stronger bonds with their parents.

Research studies of how children's brains respond to reading show positive associations between home reading and brain activation while listening to a story. Children who are read to before entering school are more likely to enjoy school and be successful there. In 2014, the American Academy of Pediatrics issued a policy statement recommending that parents read to their children beginning at birth and continuing at least through kindergarten.

Some parents may worry about whether they are reading the "right" books or in the "right" way. Parents can be reassured that the most important approach is to develop a habit of reading to your child as an enjoyable experience. The following are some tips on developing the habit of reading with your preschool child:



- Reading doesn't have to be a big project. Even a 3-minute story each night will help your child learn.
- Reading should be fun; you don't have to finish a story if your child loses interest.
- Let your child choose the book, even if you read the same book over and over again.
- Ask your child to help "read" a book that he or she knows well; your child may have memorized parts of it from hearing it many times.
- While reading, point to the pictures and ask your child what he or she thinks about the pictures, or what may happen next.
- It is fine to read the same book over and over again; children can learn to build language skills by hearing stories repeatedly.

There are many resources available to help you and your child read together. Many local libraries have story times for preschoolers where the librarians read books to parents and their children. Reach Out and Read is an organization of medical professionals who sponsor early literacy and school readiness by providing children's books to parents during clinic visits and by talking about the importance of reading during medical visits.