

26 Ideas...

Using Books to Stimulate Your Child's Language

Story Talk

Talking about what you read is another way to help children develop language and thinking skills. You don't need to plan the talk or expect an answer.

What You'll Need

Reading materials

What To Do

1. Read slowly and pause occasionally to think out loud about a story. You can speculate: "I wonder what's going to happen next!" Or ask a question: "Do you know what a palace is?" Or point out: "Look where the little mouse is now."
2. Answer your children's questions, and if you think they don't understand something, stop and ask them. Don't worry if you break into the flow of a story to make something clear.
3. Read the name of the book's author and illustrator and make sure your children understand what they do.

Talking about stories helps children develop their vocabularies.

R and R: Repetition and Rhyme

Repetition makes books predictable, and young readers love knowing what comes next.

What You'll Need

Short rhyming poems

What To Do

4. Pick a story with repeated phrases or a poem you and your child like.
5. For example, read:

Wolf Voice: Little pig, little pig, Let me come in.

Little Pig: Not by the hair on my chinny-chin-chin.

Wolf Voice: Then I'll huff and I'll puff, And I'll blow your house in!

After the wolf has blown down the first pig's house, your child will soon join in with the refrain.

6. Read slowly, and with a smile or a nod, let your children know you appreciate their participation.
7. As children grow more familiar with the story, pause and give them the chance to "fill in the blanks."
8. Encourage your children to pretend to read, especially books that contain repetition and rhyme. Most children who enjoy reading will eventually memorize all or parts of a book and imitate your reading.

When youngsters anticipate what's coming next in a story or poem, they have a sense of mastery over books. When children feel power, they have courage to try. Pretending to read is an important step in the process of learning to read.

Look For Books

The main thing is to find books you both love. They will shape your child's first impression of the world of reading.

What To Do

9. Ask friends, neighbors, and teachers to share the names of their favorite books.
10. Visit your local public library, and as early as possible, get your child a library card. Ask the librarian for help in selecting books. (Also see the resources section at the end of this book.)
11. Look for award-winning books. Each year the American Library Association selects children's books for the Caldecott Medal for illustration and the Newbery Medal for writing.
12. Check the book review sections of newspapers and magazines for recommended new children's books.
13. As soon as they're old enough, have your children join you in browsing for books and making selections.
14. If you and your child don't enjoy reading a particular book, put it aside and pick up another one.

Keep in mind your child's reading level and listening level are different. When you read easy books, beginning readers will soon be reading along with you. When you read more advanced books, you instill a love of stories, and you build the motivation that transforms children into lifelong readers.

Read to Me!

The single most important way for children to develop the knowledge they need to succeed in reading is for you to read aloud to them--beginning early.

What you'll need

Good books

A children's dictionary (preferably a sturdy one)

Paper, pencils, crayons, markers

What to do

15. Read aloud to your child every day. From birth to 6 months your baby probably won't understand what you're reading, but that's okay. You can get her used to the sound of your voice and get her used to seeing and touching books.
16. To start out, use board books with no words or just a few words. Point to the colors and the pictures and say their names. Simple books can teach children things that will later help them learn to read. For example, they learn about the structure of language--that there are spaces between the words and that the print goes from left to right.
17. Tell stories. Encourage your child to ask questions and talk about the story. Ask her to predict what will come next. Point to things in books that she can relate to in her own life: "Look at the picture of the penguin. Do you remember the penguin we saw at the zoo?"
18. Look for reading programs. If you aren't a good reader, programs in your community like Even Start can provide opportunities for you to improve your own reading and to read with your child. Friends and relatives can also read to your child, and senior citizen volunteers are available in many communities to do the same.
19. Buy a children's dictionary--if possible, one that has pictures next to the words. Then start the "let's look it up" habit.
20. Make writing materials available.
21. Watch educational TV. Programs such as "Sesame Street" and "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood" help your child learn the alphabet and the sounds they represent.
22. Visit the library often. Begin making weekly trips to the library when your child is very young. See that your child gets her own library card as soon as possible. Many libraries issue cards to children as soon as they can print their names (you'll have to countersign for them).
23. Read yourself. What you do sets an example for your child.

The ability to read and understand makes for better students and leads to better job opportunities and a lifetime of enjoyment.

Read Along

The following is intended to help you become a parent who is great at reading with your child. You'll find ideas and activities to enrich this precious time together.

Children become readers when their parents read to them. It really is as simple as that. And here's the good news: It's easy to do and it's great fun. With a little practice you will be making the memories of a lifetime, memories both you and your child will cherish.

It is best to read to your child early and often. But it's never too late to begin. **Start today.**

Although the activities in this section are designed to enhance reading aloud with preschoolers and beginning readers, a child is never too old to be read to.

With youngsters, remember that reading is a physical act, as well as a mental one. It involves hand-eye coordination. So, when you read, involve your child by:

24. pointing out objects in the pictures;
25. following the words with your finger (so your child develops a sense that the words go from left to right on the page); and
26. having your child help turn the pages (to learn that the pages turn from right to left).