

Tips for Families:

How To Build Language and Reading Skills at Home

Your baby is always listening, watching and learning from you!

Research shows babies learn language when they hear lots of words from a caregiver. This helps them learn to read once they start school. Starting from birth, talk, sing, and share books with your child. This will help them grow up to be a reader.

Respond to your child's sounds, smiles and interests

Why? Lots of “back-and-forth” words and actions with your little one helps them to learn language.

Try this with a baby: Talk, smile and point to things your baby is looking at.

For example:

- Baby looks at the light.
- You point and say, “Light.”
- Baby smiles.
- You smile and say, “That’s a bright light!”

Try this with a toddler or preschooler:

Show interest and talk about what your child is doing.

For example:

- Child picks up a leaf on the ground.
- You smile and say, “Nice red leaf.”
- Child says, “Leaf” and picks up another one.
- You say, “Wow, now you have two.” You point to each leaf and count. “One. Two. Two leaves!”

Sing songs and nursery rhymes

Why? Why? Songs and nursery rhymes are usually slow, and repeat the same words and rhythm. This helps babies and children focus on the sounds and words they hear.

Try this: Keep singing the same song to your child. See if they can fill in some words.

For example: Sing, “Twinkle, twinkle little star” Even if they giggle, make a sound, or say part of the word, it shows they are learning!

Snuggle up and enjoy a book with your little one

Why? Reading one picture book a day together can help your child hear about 78,000 words each year. That’s a lot of words. Many of these words could be new to your little one. Hearing lots of words helps a child learn to speak and understand language. Later on, it helps them read on their own.

Try this: Enjoying a book isn’t only about reading!

- Let your child hold the book or even put it in their mouth.
- Point at the pictures and talk about them.

Ask questions like:

- “Can you turn the page?”
- “Show me the red slide.”
- “What would you do if you went to the park and it started to rain, like in the book?”
- “Why was the child surprised in the story?”

Talk about letters (once your child turns four)

Why? Around age four, children start to learn that letters of the alphabet look different from pictures, and that they make certain sounds. This helps the child get ready to learn to read.

Try this: Point to and name letters and the sounds they make. You can do this when looking at books, flyers, boxes or signs.

For example:

- “This is an M. It says mmmmmm, like mmmmmuffin!”

Please visit www.childrensliteracy.ca for more tips!



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Questions you may be asking:

How To Build Language and Reading Skills at Home

Question

Answer

Why are my child's language skills important for reading?

Building language skills teaches a child about sounds and words, and how they go together to make sentences. This helps the child not only to learn how to read words on a page, but also to understand what they read.



What is the best way I can prepare my child to learn to read?

Talk, sing and read to your child! Research shows that children who are around lots of words learn important skills that help get them ready to read in school.



How do I work on my child's language and reading skills when I'm too busy?

It is hard to find extra time in your day. There are helpful things you can do during regular daily activities.



For example:

Tell your baby what you are doing when you are getting them dressed: "First we'll put on your diaper. Now let's put your arms into your sleeves." Talk about signs and other things you see when you are walking or on the bus. "Look at the stop sign. It's red. The letters are white."



Sing songs and play games that talk about body parts when you are giving your child a bath. "Here is my nose. Can you show me your nose?"



My child doesn't know all their letters. Should they know them before they start school?

No. It is more important that your child has been learning language skills during their first years of life. Research shows children who start school knowing very little about letters and sounds can still learn to read well. Develop their vocabulary skills and make sure they communicate well at home before they begin school.

