

Helping Your Baby, Toddler or Preschooler Learn to Read and Write

You do it every day - without even thinking about it! Sing a lullaby to your baby. Say a silly rhyme to your toddler. Read your preschooler a favorite bedtime story. You know these things make your child happy. Did you know you are helping your child learn reading and writing skills, too?

Even though most children don't start to read until they are 5 to 7 years old, learning to read and write starts the day they are born. You are your child's first teacher. Start early to help your child learn to love reading and writing. It's one of the best things you can do to make sure your child succeeds in school.

5 Things to Do With Your Baby

1. Hold, touch, and make eye contact with your baby a lot. No one is more important to your baby than you. When you hold and touch your baby, you are helping your baby be calm and pay attention to your face and the sounds you make. You are also helping your baby start to be able to use muscles. These things will be important for later reading and writing.
2. Talk and sing to your baby. Even though your baby can't talk back, your baby is soaking in everything you say! Talk or sing during daily routines like diaper changing, bath time, feeding, or play time. Your baby will begin to recognize sounds and familiar words.
3. Imitate the faces and sounds your baby makes. Babies love to make faces with you and hear you repeat the sounds they make. Your baby will begin to understand imitating and how to "read" faces.
4. Give your baby something interesting to look at in the crib. A mobile helps babies focus their eyes. Your baby will watch it move and try to touch it.
5. Read to your baby. Every day. Use cardboard or cloth books with bright colors. Don't worry if your baby wants to throw and chew on the books! The important thing is that your baby is starting to learn about books and reading right from the start.

5 Things to Do With Your Toddler

1. Keep reading. Your toddler will love to read the same books over and over. Toddlers may want to hold the book by themselves. Ask questions like "Where's the...?" and "What's that?" Make sure you wait a minute to give your child time to think about the answer.
2. Let your toddler "write" with you. Toddlers like to do every day things with you. Let your toddler pretend-write a grocery shopping list with you.
3. Talk and sing with your toddler. Talk about the things you and your toddler do together. Point out signs and worlds you see. Have fun singing songs or reading stories that rhyme with your toddler.
4. Play with your toddler. Play time is one of the best times to help your child with

reading and writing skills. Pretend-play going to the grocery store, or having a meal. Act out eating with real dishes and name them while you play.

5. Put magnetic alphabet letters on the refrigerator. Spell out words and names with the letters. Then say the words and letters out loud to your toddler. Your child will feel the shapes of letters by moving them around, too.

Young children are very good at learning more than one language.

In fact, childhood is the best time to learn a second language!

**Make sure your child gets a lot of chances to talk,
read, and pretend-write in both languages.**

5 Things to Do With Your Preschooler

1. Read even more! Your preschooler may want to "read" stories to you, too. Ask your child questions about the story, like "What do you think will happen next?"
2. Label everything. Label things around the house, like "bed" or "door". Write your child's name at the bottom of pictures he or she makes.
3. Point out things with letters and words. Point out letters and words all around you. Have your child read signs you see when you are in the car, or at the grocery store. Have your child pick out letters in the magazines you read.
4. Go to the library a lot. Help your preschooler get a library card. Let your child check out new books to read from the library every week.
5. Write down things your child tells you. Ask if your child wants to send a note to a friend or grandparent. Let your child say it to you, and write it down. You can also let your child make a book. Let your child tell you a story and write it down. Your child can make a cover for it, and staple it together. Then read it together.

What About Child Care?

You and your family are always your child's first and best teachers. Build on what you do at home by making sure that your child is having fun with reading and writing in child care, too. There are a lot of things your child's caregiver can do to help your baby, toddler or preschooler with reading and writing.