



First Steps

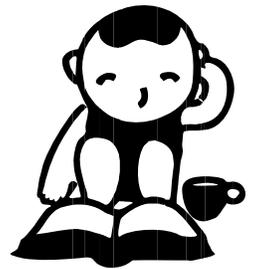
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Get Ready to Read

Our children do not come with instructions. Parents Reaching Out provides resources that help families make informed decisions about the care and education of their children. We thank the Parent Education Network, a project of Parents Helping Parents of Wyoming, Inc. for permitting us to share their *Thoughts for Tots* in this information series.

Reading readiness is an important step for preschoolers. It sets children up for success and gives them all the steps they need to begin reading. For toddlers who are ten to eighteen months old, books can be used to help them learn to identify objects. A parent can point at the pictures and name them to the toddler.

Children will start to learn things about reading even if they don't understand what the story is about. They will learn that we read left to right, top to bottom. Later, between the ages of two and three, toddlers begin to understand and follow the plots of stories and remember characters and scenes. Soon they will become much more interested in the story. Slowly things come together, and at about the age of six or seven, they can read simple stories themselves.



Source: White, "Educating the Infant and Toddler"

Every Child is Ready to Learn

When your child sits on your lap as you read, he learns many things. He learns that you are reading the words from the pages, and that the words on the pages mean something. They discover that reading is important to grown-ups, that reading is interesting, and that reading can be funny, serious, sad or happy.

There is a lot a child must learn before she actually starts to read. Being able to recognize letters does not necessarily mean that children are ready to start reading. First they need to understand that letters are symbols...that each symbol represents a sound...that sounds can be combined to make words...that words combine to make sentences...and that sentences have meanings. Developing pre-reading skills will have far-reaching effects even beyond the elementary years. Just a few reasons for developing these skills include:

- Helping your child discover the excitement of reading builds a life-long learner.
- The more children are read to, the easier reading is going to be for them.
- The more skills toddlers have, the easier each step becomes, building confidence in their ability to master new things.

Building a Bigger Vocabulary

- Use complete sentences. Don't shy away from words you don't think your child will understand. They learn the meaning of words by hearing them in context.
- Whenever you go places, take time to point out new words. At the grocery store, point out words such as "milk", "bread", and other products.
- Harvard University researchers have found that good dinner conversation is one of the best ways to help children learn new vocabulary. Source: <http://www.parentsoup.com/preschool>

Building a love for reading

- Make reading fun. One of the highest predictors of success is that a child enjoys reading.
- Find books on subjects that capture their imagination.
- The more time you spend reading to your child, the more she will love reading.
- Increase attention span by limiting TV, video games and computer games that don't require much thought.
- Encourage reading by having the child act out favorite stories as they are read.

Fun Activities Can Foster Learning

- Have children make shapes with their body. Example: Have them bend their arms and legs to make a "C" shape. Have children find letters of the alphabet in the words on cereal boxes. Run in the snow or wet sand to make letter shapes from the tracks. Sit in a circle and roll a ball in the shape of a letter back and forth between different children.
- Use uncooked pasta for drawing different letters.
- Arrange popsicle sticks into different letters.
- Randomly select letters and have preschoolers think of foods that start with that sound and then help them prepare those foods for a snack.



For more information call Parents Reaching Out. We offer phone consultations and provide workshops in English or Spanish to communities throughout New Mexico. This publication was developed under a grant from the New Mexico Department of Health Family Infant Toddler program. However, the views here expressed do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Health and should not be assumed to be an endorsement by the New Mexico Department of Health.

