

Nine Tips to Help Little Ones Love Reading

Make reading fun. The first rule of sharing books is to have fun together. It can be noisy fun or quiet fun or cozy fun—whatever works at the moment. For many adults, their happiest memories are of parents reading to them. While creating memories and having fun, your child is also getting excited about becoming a reader. Their love of books will help them through the challenges of learning to read.

Read aloud every day. Read at bedtime but also at opportune moments during the day. Play around with your approach. Use expression. Change your voice to indicate dialogue. Vary your speed—slow down to build suspense, speed up to convey excitement. (But don't read too fast—listening is hard work.) Realize that some children enjoy sitting still, but others listen best when they are fidgeting with something or moving around. The deciding factor is if they're enjoying the book.

Vary your reading methods. Read together in different ways. Sometimes you'll read straight through a picture book from beginning to end. Sometimes one of you might want to stop and talk about something. Other times your child might just want to turn pages and look at pictures. There's no right way. Some books, like rhyming ones, invite a child to participate. Pause so that your child can fill in words, identify animals, answer questions in the story, and respond in other ways.

Mix it up. Read a variety of books from old favorites to new titles. Be sure your child has a say in the choices—that can make all the difference in their interest level. Expect to read favorite books over and over. Each repetition serves an important purpose, such as reinforcing new vocabulary. Familiar books are comforting for children, but also try an array of new books to find new favorites. Many children enjoy informational books as well as stories.

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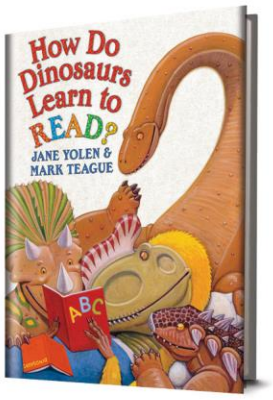
Create a home rich in books. Fill your home with print: books, newspapers, magazines, and cookbooks. Add e-books to the mix if that's appealing. Visit libraries and bookstores together, attending story times and other programs. Make sure your child sees *you* reading for your own pleasure and information, since children model themselves on the adults around them. To show the value of books, ask relatives and friends to give them as gifts. Give your child his or her own bookshelf or bookcase if you have space.

Connect books to everything. Tie books into many aspects of your child's life**.** Read dinosaur books and then visit a natural history museum. If you have a pet or are getting one, read together about that type of pet. Cook together from a printed recipe or cookbook. Make simple crafts with your child from printed instructions. Find books about some of your child's current interests such as insects, ballet, sports, or outer space.

Keep talking. Conversation makes reading easier to learn. In talking and listening, children acquire new words and absorb the structure of sentences. Play with language together. Mention when words rhyme and think of easy rhyming words together. Make a game out of noticing initial sounds of words. Reinforce this with a magnetic alphabet on a refrigerator or whiteboard. Encourage your child to point out print everywhere: food and clothes labels, street signs, billboards, and more.

Write together. Supply your child with lots of writing and drawing materials. Writing reinforces reading. For young children, writing can be as simple as drawing a picture and telling a story to go with it—or dictating a story for you to print and your child to illustrate. Don't limit writing activities to stories. Work together on grocery lists, letters, thank you notes, and greeting cards. Make short books together, which can be wonderful gifts for grandparents, friends, and other relatives.

Recognize the power of reading together. When you read aloud, your child absorbs the basics of literacy—print goes from left to right, books read from front to back, and pictures relate to the words and help tell the story. Children start to see that stories have beginnings, middles, and ends, and many contain dialogue. This great preparation for reading comes naturally when you read aloud.



This guide was prepared by Kathleen Odean. A school librarian for more than fifteen years, Kathleen now presents professional development workshops on new children's books. She chaired the 2002 Newbery Award Committee and is the author of four guides to children's books, including Great Books for Babies and Toddlers.

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