



Supporting children's talking, listening, reading and writing at home

Starting out with reading

Parents and carers always have questions about doing reading 'right'. Questions range from 'When should I start?' and 'Is it silly to read to my new baby?' through 'What do I read?' and 'What if I haven't been reading at all – is it too late to start?' to 'I'm not a very good reader – how can I be a good role model for my children?'

To start, there is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to read with your children. There are things you can do that will make it more interesting, more enjoyable, and more worthwhile, and to guarantee that both you and the children will be looking forward to the next session.

But all you need to start is a book – or a story – and you and your child.

It is never too early to introduce books to your children. Reading, talking about books and their characters, and sharing ideas about the events in books can start with a newborn. Some parents even like to start reading aloud to their child before birth.

Talking generally and reading with young children helps them to become familiar with the sound of the parents' voices, and of the different tones and shades of expression that are used in story-telling and reading. They become used to the sounds and words of the language, and communication in general, as well as the pleasure of books and storytelling.

Reading and stories stimulate the imagination and help children learn about the world around them.

It is never too late to start reading to your children. They will be happy to have your undivided attention for the duration of the story. If you aren't sure of a good book to start with, ask your local librarian or the school librarian. These experts read to children all the time, so they know what works.

Make a routine time and place, if you like. With young children sitting beside you or on your knee is best, so they can see the pictures and understand that you are reading what it says on the page. It's important to read what is written, without commenting, until the book is



finished. Authors write their books to be read from the beginning to the end. Go back and talk about the events then. Children will often want the same book read over and over, so it's important that they know it is the same every time, and no matter who reads the text. This is part of early text awareness that is important for their own reading development.

Bedtime is always a good space as older children can relax and really enjoy the story. Turn off other distractions, like the TV or devices, and allow your children to concentrate on listening.

Read every day. Set a limit of three (or so) picture books, or one chapter of a longer text.

Tell stories every day - at the dinner table, on those long car trips, and walking in the bush. Anne E. Stewart has lots of ideas about turning family events into stories to help your child develop their own sense of self, culture and heritage. Anne has an excellent introduction at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-x2-FhNsljo>

Choosing books to read can be a challenge. There is some research from the US showing that for babies 0-12 months, books with individually named characters work well, and enhances attention (ref: <https://theconversation.com/for-babys-brain-to-benefit-read-the-right-books-at-the-right-time-83076> Accessed 15/8/2018)

Use your local librarian to help you choose. Public libraries in Australia are free, and you can borrow 4-5 items at a time, and change them as often as you want. They also have storytelling and book-reading sessions where you and your children can enjoy someone else reading.

Here are some books that young children enjoy. You may need to buy some of these if they become favourites, as you will get tired of getting the same items from the library every week.

- *Dear Zoo* by Rod Campbell
- *Brown bear brown bear, What do you see?* by Bill Martin Junior
- *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle
- *The Snowman* by Raymond Briggs
- *I went walking* by Sue Machin
- *Who Sank the Boat?* by Pamela Allen – and almost anything else by her
- *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* by Michael Rosen



If you aren't a confident reader, then the earlier you start reading to your children the better. Young children love the experience of being read to, and they are not judgmental. They love you for being you, caring and spending time with them. By the time your child is ready to start school and their own learning about text, you will have had five years of excellent practice, and will be more than able to support their learning, and show them how it's done.

We now know that early learning activities help language and brain development, increase vocabulary and assist with conceptual development. These pre-literacy skills will be used again and again as your children develop their literacy skills. There are strong links between literacy, success at school, and self-esteem. The links with further success in later life are well-established.

Talking, listening to, singing, playing and reading with your child every day builds early literacy skills. They will use these when they go to school, and you will be setting them up for achievement later in life.

Websites to check out:

<https://www.better-beginnings.com.au/programs/birth-three>

<https://www.better-beginnings.com.au/research/research-about-literacy-and-reading>

<http://raisingchildren.net.au/>

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-29/reading-to-kids-ending-too-early-study-says/8849622>