

READING TO CHILDREN

Reading to young children encourages and fosters creative thinking skills, promotes reading as an enjoyable activity, provides an educational opportunity for children to grow and develop mentally, gives children an appreciation and respect for books, enhances language and vocabulary development, and allows for quality family time, among other things.

Begin reading to children at a very young age. Children below 12 months will still be able to look at large objects in picture books while you talk to them and tell them what everything is.

To get a non-reader interested in reading you can create books with your child. Not only does this encourage reading or wanting to be read to, but it also provides an opportunity for a family activity. You can make a book for or with your baby or young child by cutting sturdy pieces of fabric or cardboard into square pieces. Glue a large, colorful picture of the child, family members, pets, toys, or other things your child may be familiar with on each page. You may also want to glue on a piece of sandpaper, fabric, or other textured items that the child can feel. Write a word or a couple of words in large, clear letters under the picture and bind together by sewing, stapling or using a three-hole punch and yarn or ribbon.

When we read to children we:

- Answer children's questions.
- Promote language skills
- Promote reading skills
- Develop longer attention spans
- Strengthen family relationships

Parents who don't read can still encourage reading to children by making up stories to go with picture books with no words or attending a regular storytelling time with their children.

By reading with your children regularly you are:

- stimulating their imaginations;
- developing their understanding of how language works;
- helping them to discover the joys of reading;
- strengthening your relationship with your child; and
- giving them a great start to their education.

EARLY LITERACY BEHAVIOURS THAT CAN BE LEARNT THROUGH READING TO YOUR CHILD

1. Book Handling Behaviours

- Behaviours related to a child's physical manipulation or handling of books, such as page turning and holding the book the correct way.

2. Looking and Recognizing

- Behaviours related to how children pay attention to and interact with pictures in books, such as gazing at pictures or laughing at a favorite picture.
- Behaviours that show recognition of and a beginning understanding of pictures in books, such as pointing to pictures of familiar objects.

3. Picture and Story Comprehension

- Behaviours that show a child's understanding of pictures and events in a book, such as imitating an action seen in a picture or talking about the events in a story.

4. Story-Reading Behaviours

- Behaviours that include children's verbal interactions with books and their increasing understanding of print in books, such as babbling in imitation of reading or running fingers along printed words

Early literacy skills are essential to literacy development and should be the focus of early language and literacy programs. By focusing on the importance of the first years of life, we give new meaning to the interactions young children have with books and stories. Looking at early literacy development as a dynamic developmental process, we can see the connection (and meaning) between an infant mouthing a book, the book handling behavior of a two year old and the page turning of a five year old. We can see that the first three years of exploring and playing with books, singing nursery rhymes, listening to stories, recognizing words, and scribbling are truly the building blocks for language and literacy development.