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Becoming a Reader

By Tony Trott

The federal government has made learning to read a priority for children. I'm sure that everyone has heard the pledge by government officials that 'every child will read well and read independently by the end of third grade.' Well, that pledge is not going to happen unless teaching reading and literacy skills happens at home as well as school.

Learning to read is not automatic; it's not something that just happens. People need to make a concerted effort to learn to read. That learning should begin at birth and continue on, always. I consider myself a fairly competent reader but every time I read I come across words that I don't understand or phrases that I have never before encountered. In short, learning to read does not have an end but it definitely has a beginning.

From birth you should talk to your child. Though he or she may not understand what you are saying, the baby will begin to understand how language works and realize that it is something they should learn to do as well. Reading to your child is always good no matter what the age. But this should start early, too.

"The majority of reading problems faced by today's adolescents and adults are the result of problems that might have been avoided or resolved in their early childhood."

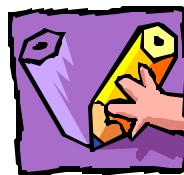
-- National Academy of Sciences

When you read a book to a child, let the two of you become part of the book. Use special voices for certain characters; let your child see the pictures, point out interesting things, or turn the pages. At the first stages of reading it's very important to make 'storytime' an interactive project.



As the child grows and begins to recognize letters and signs (e.g., a stop sign), you should continue to make as much as possible interactive. When you come across a stop sign, you should point out things like: it has four letters on it, the first letter is an s, and then explain what the word stop means and why the sign is there. This does not only apply to street signs, it works just as well with a box of cereal at the breakfast table.

Predictable stories are another way to make storytime interactive. For example, when you have read/told a story like *The Three Little Pigs* to your child so many times that he or she knows it by heart, he or she will enjoy playing the part of the pigs or the wolf.



As the child continues to grow, he or she will most likely pretend to read books and pretend to write things like his or her name. Encourage all of this. Writing plays a huge role in learning to read. Everyone likes to read things that they, themselves, wrote. Encourage your child's attempts to write. It may not be worthy of a

Pulitzer Prize, but it will lead to better educational outcomes for him or her.

Teachers of young children are well aware of the important role reading plays in the life of a child. They are also aware that you, the child's parents, play a major role in developing those skills. Help your child from the beginning and he may not need as much help later on.



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