

• Together Time •



Read Together 20
Minutes Every Day™

Read With a Child

Our Read Together 20 Minutes Every Day™ message is important because it aims to strengthen both a child's early literacy skills and the emotional connection between the child and the special adults in their life.

However, the joy of reading shouldn't be constrained by the clock. If your child's attention span is at or beyond the 20-minute mark, that is fantastic! You can

tackle longer stories, and soon you may even consider chapter books. If your child is an infant or a toddler, their attention span will likely be less than 20 minutes, and that is typical. You can either read short stories or read a few pages from a book several times a day. Five minutes now and five minutes later will soon add up to 20 minutes throughout the day. Regardless of your approach, we encourage you to view reading not as a timed task but as an enjoyable experience you and your child spend together.

Pledge to Read Together 20 Minutes Every Day

We get it – life is busy! But when reading becomes a family commitment, it is much easier to reach the goal of reading 20 minutes every day. Every time you read a book together, you are providing your child with valuable skills they will use in school and throughout



life. Sharing books helps develop language and literacy skills, exposing your child to a richer vocabulary. Reading non-fiction titles opens doors to the world of knowledge, while books on social and emotional topics help a child learn to deal with life's ups and downs.

To help create a reading habit, be sure to read with your child every day, and select books according to their age, attention span, and interests. Your local library is a great resource!

Engage family members and other caregivers in the excitement – and commitment – of reading with your child 20 minutes every day. These simple ideas will keep you all on the same page and will help you enjoy countless minutes reading together:

- Bring books to grandma's
- Encourage other family members to read with your child
- Tell your babysitter that reading together is preferred over screen time
- Ask your child's teacher what topics they are working on and volunteer to come and read to the class
- Talk with other parents about reading and share our message on social media about the importance of reading together 20 minutes every day

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Fun Dough

Reading and playing go hand in hand when it comes to early learning. Find ways to bring your child's favorite book to life during your play time. Blocks and fun dough are two favorites! You can make your own fun dough by following this recipe:

1 cup flour	1/2 cup water
1/4 cup salt	Food coloring
1 tbs. cooking oil	

1. Mix the flour and the salt in a bowl.
2. Make a well in the center and pour in the oil.
3. In a separate bowl or dish, add a few drops of food coloring to the water and mix.
4. Add the colored water to the dry ingredients a little at a time.
5. Mix and knead until smooth. Add more water if the mixture is too dry or more flour if it's too sticky.

Play With a Purpose

Blocks and fun dough are great tools to help raise a child who loves reading. Why? Because tools like these "transform" the flat world of books into a child's three dimensional world.

Young children learn by exploring the world with all of their senses. When parents provide children with playful

opportunities to transfer the vocabulary of books into tangible objects, children will learn through their senses by:

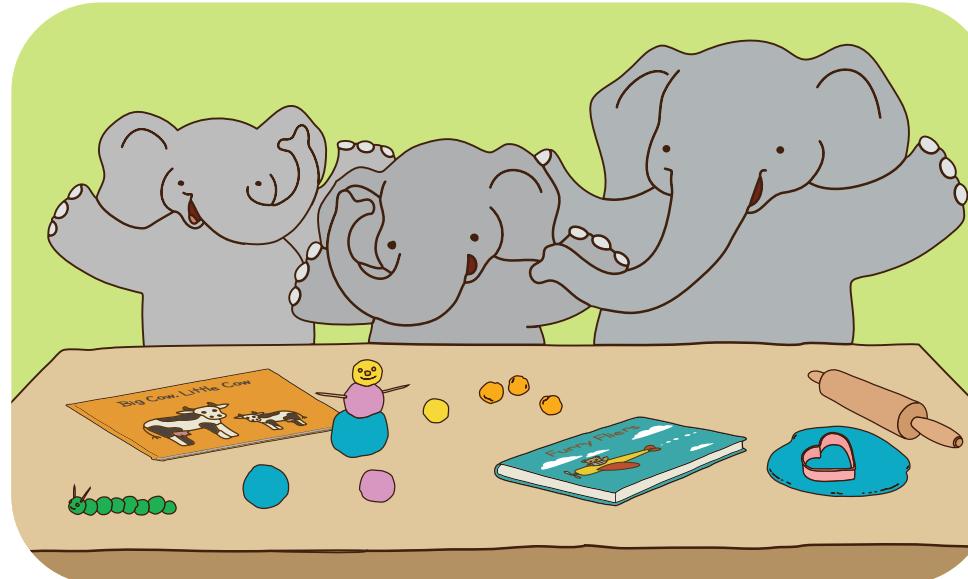
- Seeing: the object in the book and the three dimensional object
- Touching: the fun dough to model the object
- Hearing: a parent's instructions and praise
- Smelling: the ingredients by themselves and combined
- Tasting: edible fun dough from recipes online, or foods like cheese sticks to model the object

Think about how fun it will be to use fun dough to create all the food *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* ate. Or imagine the delight sparked by watching your child model Wilbur and Charlotte as they recreate a part of the story from *Charlotte's Web*.

When children are able to bring a concept they have learned in a book into a 3D experience, that knowledge becomes

meaningful and less likely to be forgotten. That's what educators call learning!

Playing with a purpose is all about nurturing skills that are essential for success in school while children do one of their favorite things: play! Along with Reading Together 20 Minutes Every Day, it is one of our guiding principles at The Children's Reading Foundation.



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I Spy

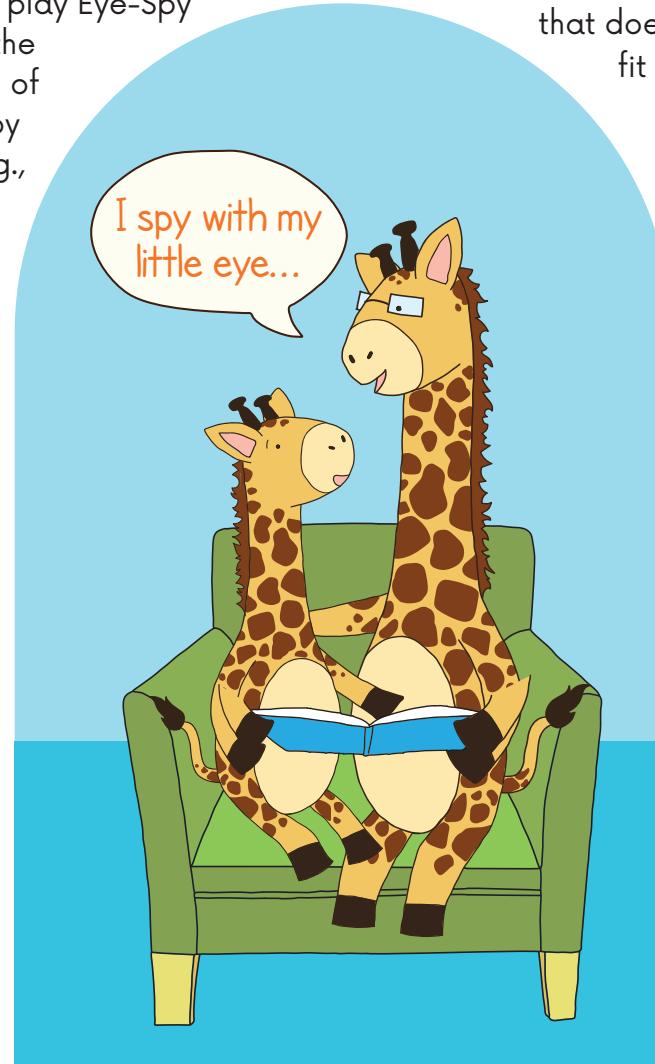
When you have read the same book over and over but your child continues to be interested, you can do more than read: play with the book! Use the illustrations in the book to play Eye-Spy and have an extended conversation about the objects you "spy." You can increase the level of difficulty according to your child's abilities by selecting objects by their color or group (e.g., animals, plants, inanimate objects, etc.).

Take turns while playing with the book, and invite more family members to participate for a richer interaction and vocabulary exploration. Remember, while reading is fundamental, the conversations you have around books will also provide your child with a rich lexicon that will be invaluable in school and in life.

Read, Play & Learn

Playing with books can be a lot of fun! When you purposefully explore a book, you can spend valuable minutes interacting and learning with your child. Here are some simple game ideas you can play together:

- Play Eye-Spy, giving increasingly more complex descriptions of the objects you are spying.



- Invite your child to say the lines in a book he or she has memorized, letting your little one become part of the story.
 - Every once in a while, change the dialogue to something that doesn't make sense in the story. Ask why it doesn't fit the story (e.g., The Cat in the Bat).
- Set up a scavenger hunt at home with objects featured in the books you are reading together.
 - Build an obstacle course with your child's favorite books and look for something on each one (color, illustration, word, etc.).
 - Play trivia games with other family members.
 - Recreate some scenarios using blocks or fun dough.
 - Add music to some of the lines in the book and make a song about the story.
 - Ask your child to jump every time you say a certain word used repeatedly in the book.

Through activities like these, your child will develop sound awareness, comprehension, memory, observation, and some motor skills. Beyond promoting your child's literacy skills, you are also nurturing their love for reading that will last a lifetime.

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My Little Library

When a child organizes books, they develop a sense of appreciation for the print world. Spend some time this month helping your child arrange their little library. Organize the books alphabetically by title or author's name, just like they do at your local library. Or your child may use a less conventional method: sorting titles by personal favorites, topic, or by those best suited for younger and older siblings.

While you're at it, ask your child to pick a few books to bring to grandma's house or their next doctor visit. Books don't only build the foundation for literacy; they provide great advantages for your child's social and emotional development. Having familiar books around for different occasions can help reduce the anxiety of visiting new places.

Finding Books

Whether in a basket or on a shelf, a child's little library provides countless benefits. You may have heard the number of books at home is strongly linked to a child's academic achievements. Sometimes, however, it might not be easy to obtain books for a home library.

Here are some ideas to help:

1. Scout out books together at garage sales. Searching can be the reward itself! A child may also use allowance or gift money to buy a special book.
2. Watch for book giveaways in social media groups or on community calendars. Pay it forward when your child outgrows some of the titles you have at home. Be sure to keep their favorite books, though; they may be the next generation's favorites too!
3. Get together with some friends and have a "book giveaway" party. Your child will appreciate having a book that was once a friend's.
4. Ask your family and friends for books. Whether the books are presents for a birthday, pre-kindergarten graduation, or just because, make sure friends and relatives know you are building a home library for your child.

5. Attend summer reading events in your community. Many organizations encourage summertime reading and may give out free children's books.

Once you have a few books for your child's library, put them in a special place within their reach. Read these books aloud, explore them together, play with them, and treasure them!



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Use Your Whole Body

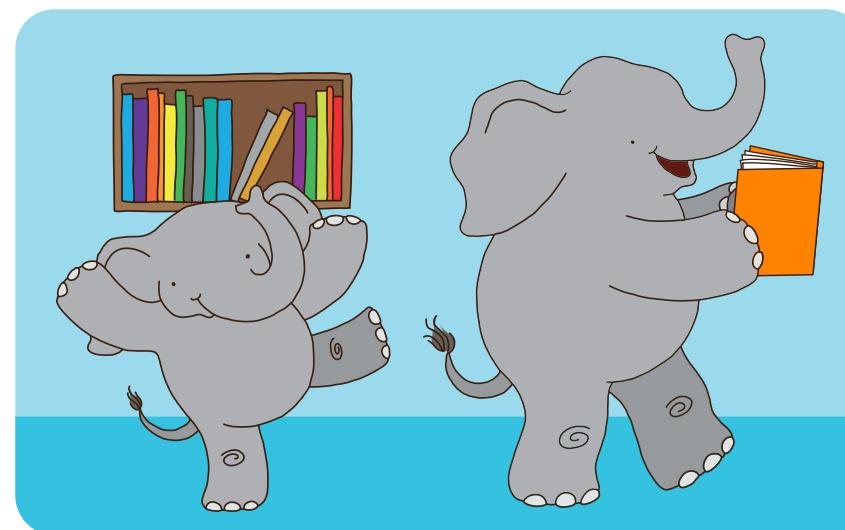
Grab your child's favorite book and start reading a page as you walk a straight line. Stop for a second every time there is a comma. Stop for two seconds when you reach a period. Turn 90 degrees every time you turn the page. Jump in excitement if there's an exclamation mark at the end of a sentence. Show a puzzled face when there is a question mark. Get the point? Have fun using your whole body as you read with your child!

Reading on your couch or at bedtime? Point to the commas and pause. Point to the periods and pause for a bit longer. Show enthusiasm and curiosity with the exclamation and question marks. Encourage your child to imitate you. They are learning punctuation as you read together this way – something they will remember forever.

Pages, Letters, Words, Oh My

As adults, we take print concepts and punctuation marks for granted. However, young readers need to understand concepts such as a book, cover, first page, last page, first sentence, last sentence, among many others. These print concepts are very abstract things to master, so here are a few more tips you can use to help your little one develop print awareness.

- Before starting to read, explore what is on the cover of the book. Talk about the colors of the illustration with babies. Talk about the author's name and, with older children, also the name of the illustrator. Some books may also include the name of the translator, which can lead to a conversation about different languages with more experienced readers.
- Announce that you will read the first page. Start reading and pause after the first paragraph. Show your child where you stopped reading and ask if he wants you to continue with the next paragraph. Older children will be delighted to compare the length of the sentences and paragraphs.
- Point out the fact that when your book is open, you are reading the left page first, then the right page. Also, that you read from top to bottom and from left to right.
- If your child is interested in print, show how some words start with the same letter as their name and how some words are short while others are very long. Want to explore books more deeply? Classify the words with older children: "This is a noun. Let's find more nouns."



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Active Reading

As you are reading, engage children in active reading. Let babies touch the pages, and direct their fingers to certain illustrations (e.g., "Where is the red hen?"). Pause to ask your toddler to point out some words in the book (e.g., "There is a word that starts with F, like 'Frida.' Can you find it? You found it so fast! Yes, it says 'fish.' 'Fish' starts with F."). Have conversations that may relate to your preschooler or school-age child's life (e.g., "How did you feel when we moved to our new home?").

Through this back and forth, you show children how much knowledge they are gaining. Simple strategies like pointing to things, answering questions, or retelling stories, promote reading comprehension. The 20 minutes you spend every day reading and talking are building a solid foundation toward reading early and well!

Fun With Books

It is easy to have fun with books when you read with your child!

Let your child see your enthusiasm! Smile! Read with a lot of expression. Change your voice and volume. Take this as an opportunity to leave daily stress behind and enjoy your time together.



Allow plenty of time to look at and talk about the pictures. Let your child turn the pages. Sometimes they may want to go backwards instead of forward. That is alright. There is no right or wrong way to explore a book when a child is young. You will have time later to emphasize that the right page follows the left page.

Pause to ask questions about the characters and events. Encourage conversation, but also give children a few seconds between questions. Don't rush a response or interpret this as lack of interest. Children are trying to make sense of their world, including the world of books.

Make up a new character or ending. Be creative and encourage children's creativity. You may be reading to a future best-selling writer!

A great goal is to read three books a day together: two familiar stories and perhaps one that is new. Not sure what to read? Search for accredited booklists online. You can also talk to your librarian. They are great allies when you have read everything at hand and want to take advantage of your child's eagerness to read.

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Every Minute Counts

Look at your Reading Tracker Calendar and think about all those days you have marked after reading together! Count out the minutes. Could you add the time you've spent engaging in conversations with your child about anything from toys, food, dinosaurs, or unicorns? Every word your child hears, whether from reading or discussions with you, has a powerful impact.



Once a week, take time to celebrate with your child by counting up the number of minutes you have read together. Do the same at the end of the month, and then at the end of the year. Think of it as a yearly present you are giving your child. When it comes to reading and literacy, each word is an investment in your child's future.

Daily Reading Has a Big Impact Over Time

An "opportunity gap" occurs when a child doesn't have the same access to early learning opportunities at home. This can result in a child starting kindergarten with skills below his or her peers.

Reading with your child for 20 minutes each day and having conversations are the best tools to overcome the opportunity gap.



This time together has a big impact:

- You are providing your child with 7,300 minutes of reading time every year!
- By the time your child starts the first day of kindergarten, you will have read with him or her for nearly 36,500 minutes!

• If you consider normal speech consists of an average of 130 words per minute, your child might have listened to 4,745,000 words by the time he or she goes to school.

• Plus, having conversations with your child throughout the day will exponentially multiply the number of words your child hears each day.

But numbers are cold! Next time you're reading together, think instead about the millions of neural connections that are happening in the young brain. These connections prepare your child's mind for all future learning. Think about all the positive interactions, learning, and growth that take place during reading time.

Reading together is also about establishing solid relationships with caring adults. These relationships have an impact on your child's self-esteem, independence, and the way he or she faces the world.

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Treasure Hunt at the Library

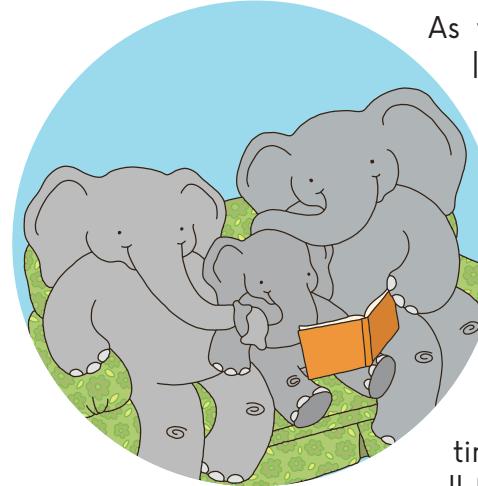
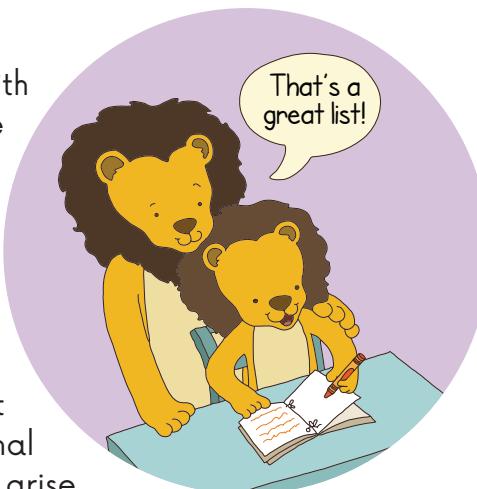
Raising a reader is about providing books and reading opportunities. It is also about supporting children as they identify and refine their preference for certain genres, topics, authors, illustrators, etc.

In preparation for your next visit to the library, take some time with your school-age children (and include younger children, if possible!) and make a list of the topics that interest them. To get the ideas flowing, talk about the book topics you liked when you were a child and why those topics interested you.

At the library, allow your children to search for books on their topics of interest, and encourage them to have a conversation with a librarian for more options.

It's Never Too Early or Too Late to Read Together

The benefits of reading with a child from infancy are impressive. However, it is never too late to start reading together. Also, be sure to continue this daily tradition even when children can read on their own. School-age children and even teens benefit from the social and emotional learning opportunities that arise when reading with parents, siblings, and caregivers.



As you can imagine, the scenario looks very different when reading with a preschooler than with a school-age child. Older children have acquired many skills over time, which can make reading together an enjoyable time for you both.

Here are tips on how to make the most out of your reading time. Some of these tips will work well for younger children; others are for older children:

1. Ask questions to explore the different perspectives of the various characters in a story.
2. Allow children the opportunity to talk about how the story relates to their own experiences.
3. Don't limit these conversations only to reading time. School-age children can participate in meaningful discussions that may have a long-lasting impact, and those interactions can happen anywhere!
4. Discuss the story with a critical lens: What would you have done differently? What was the definitive moment in the story and how would it have ended if the character had chosen A instead of B?
5. Explain and use the complex vocabulary and sentence structures presented in the story.

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Reading Tracker Calendar

Download and print the monthly reading trackers sent with the email that are on The Children's Reading Foundation website on our Resource Hub.

Fill in the dates for the month on your reading tracker and add the name of your child. Each day you read with your child, mark it on the calendar in a special way. If you read more than 20 minutes in a day, draw a star on that day. You deserve it!

If you have a preschooler or a school-age child at home, let them be in charge of the reading tracker calendar. If you have a younger child, fill it in together and describe what you are doing. For example, "We get a star today because we read together for half an hour!"



The Best 20 Minutes of Your Day!

No matter their age, when you spend 20 minutes every day reading and interacting around books, children are learning:

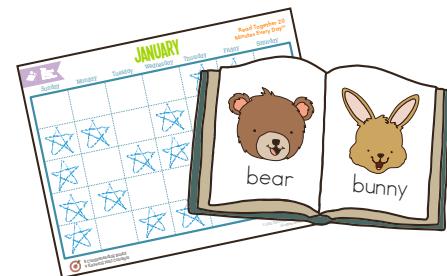
- To understand feelings and control their own behavior
- New ways of thinking, and how to interact with their environment
- To be curious and to remember special moments
- To appreciate the time spent together
- Tons of skills related to literacy that will be important in school

Children are also learning sounds, vocabulary, prereading, and multiple skills that will be reinforced day after day at home and at school. Plus, research shows the social and emotional benefits of reading aloud with children are remarkable. These include helping children curb problem behaviors such as aggression and hyperactivity to helping them cope during times of stress or anxiety.

Read with your child for 20 minutes every day this month and rest assured you are paving the road toward school readiness and healthy social and emotional development for your little one.

Far from the library? Don't worry! Any kind of text interesting to children will do the trick. Find a newspaper and read some happy news, or "walk" your child through the illustrations in a magazine and make up your own story. In the kitchen grab a recipe and pretend the ingredients are bugs for a spook-a-licious dinner.

Write a note and read it together! Understanding that different kinds of text have different intentions will be useful knowledge for your child in the future.



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Make Your Own Books

Stack two blank sheets of paper together. Next, fold them in half to make a multi-page book with a cover. Use more paper to add more pages. Staple or stitch the folded edge to "bind" the book.



Help your child create a short story that progresses from page to page. Color and/or cut and paste illustrations. Children don't need new, wrinkle-free paper for their stories. Paper bags work well, as does used paper that has writing or print on only one side from the recycle bin. Use the unprinted side of cereal and cracker boxes for covers.

Books, Books, Books!

Did you know the number of books a child has at home growing up can propel or hinder his or her academic success? This doesn't mean you need to spend a lot of money on books when your child is young. It is about realizing the significance of having children's books at home and thinking about what you can do to ensure your child has access to books or other printed materials.

Whether you can afford to buy children's books on a regular basis or rely on the library to make sure your child has access to books at home, in the right column are some considerations to keep in mind when selecting children's books.

Research confirms, time after time, the importance of books and reading. To help build a strong foundation for your child's educational success, give them access to books and read with them for 20 minutes every day!

Birth to 18 months. Select books:

- with large, bright-colored pictures an infant can see at 10 inches
- that are vinyl, cloth, or cardboard, including some that make sounds
- that are washable
- with rhythm in the words



18 to 36 months. Select books:

- that your child enjoys
- with rhymes and poems
- about basic skills: colors, shapes, counting
- about everyday experiences



3 to 4 years. Select books:

- about the alphabet
- that are classic children's books
- including non-fiction books
- with longer stories

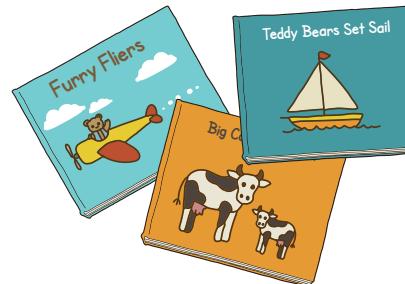
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Taking Turns Talking

When you are reading and talking with your child about a book, make sure you talk the same way as you would if engaging in a conversation with a colleague or another adult. Always respect turns and listen actively. Sometimes it is useful to hold a stuffed animal or a blanket as you talk during your turn, and then pass it on to your child as they talk. Repeat the cycle until you no longer need this type of reminder to respect each other's turn.



How Do I Read With a Child?

Our message is simple: Read with your child 20 minutes every day. But we know that sometimes reading may not feel simple for people who are not comfortable doing it, whether it is because they don't consider themselves good readers, or maybe the books are not in their native language, or simply because nobody read to them as they were growing up.

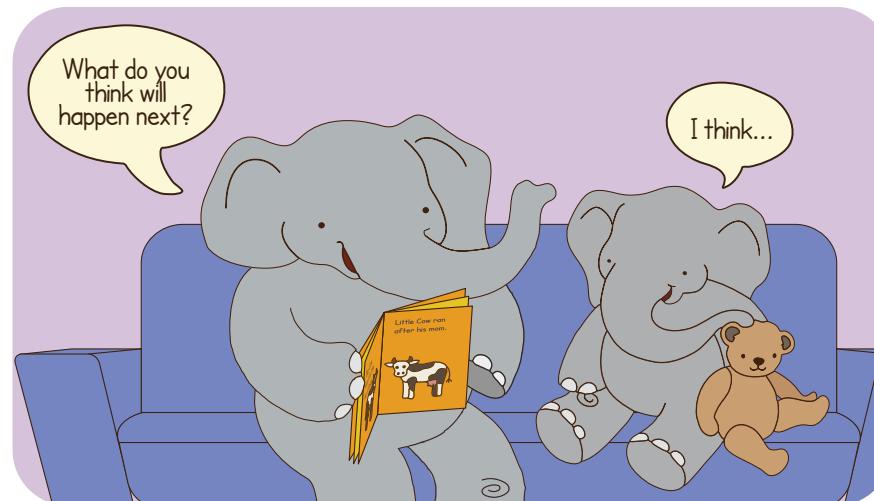
When reading with a child, the most important thing is the time spent together.

There are several ways to make reading with a child fun and engaging for both of you. One of those ways is to explore the books

and have interactive conversations about what happens in the stories. Opportunities to ask questions, make comments, and ask and share opinions will arise naturally when you read together.

Depending on the age and developmental stage of your child, ask silly or serious questions, and allow them to also ask questions to participate in this dialogue. For example, if you are reading *Green Eggs and Ham* by Dr. Seuss, you could ask: "Do you think you would like green eggs and ham?" "What animals are mentioned in the book?" "Have you ever been on a train? What food did you eat?" "Why didn't he like green eggs and ham if he had never tried them?" "Do you always say you don't like something and then find out it is pretty good?"

Having a dialogue with your child while you read not only strengthens your child's prereading skills, it also develops strong foundations for critical thinking. This kind of interaction is called *serve and return*, and it is vital for a young brain's development. If you are reading to a baby, instead of asking questions, slow down and clearly say each word. Infants need to see your mouth movements and hear words to begin to experience the rhythm of language.



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In My Life

Select a page or paragraph from a book you are reading together. For infants and toddlers, carefully describe what you see. For example, "Look at the yellow bus going down the street. It has many windows so children can see where they are and wave goodbye to their parents."

For young children, talk about how that image or paragraph relates to them: "Next year, you will go on the yellow school bus with your older sister. At school, you will talk to other children about their pets and toys. Are you excited to go on the school bus?"

If you are reading with a school-age child, ask more detailed questions, such as: "Where are the children going?" "How do you think they felt about going to school on the first day?" "Were they happy? Nervous? Do you feel that way, too?"

Why Reading?

There is compelling evidence that 85 to 90 percent of brain growth occurs in the first five years of life, and it happens as a product of a child's experiences, including the time spent reading together with parents or caregivers. Some researchers have been able to prove that specific areas of the brain that support reading skills are impacted when children listen to age-appropriate stories.



Here are some tips as you begin reading with your child:

- Allocate 20 minutes a day for reading together (and some more time to read by yourself). Be a reading role model.
- Be flexible and read together for as long as you can keep your child interested. Five minutes now, five later, and 10 at bedtime.
- Select books and materials that your child will find interesting and relatable. For example, a colorful picture book for babies and toddlers, a story about new friends for preschoolers, and a chapter book about the adventures of a school-age child for those starting school soon or already in school.

• Even if reading from an electronic device is tempting, prioritize face-to-face interaction. The closeness promoted by the human voice, its rhythm and inflection, are hard to replicate on an electronic device.

Enjoy these precious times. Reading together will create amazing memories your child will cherish the rest of their life.

