

Every Child Ready to Read

As parents of children under the age of five, you may think that they may be too young for books. But the library doesn't think so! I want to tell you about an important program that focuses on children from birth to five years old and the role of books in their lives. It is called Every Child Ready to Read® and it was created by the Public Library Association and the Association for Library Service to Children. The purpose of this nationwide program is for libraries and community partners to help parents develop early literacy skills in children. These skills prepare children so when it is time for them to read and write they are ready and are less likely to encounter reading difficulties. The 6 early literacy skills as listed by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) are:

- Letter knowledge – knowing letters are different from each other, the same letter can look different, and that each letter has a name and is related to sounds.
- Phonological awareness – the ability to hear and play with the smaller sounds in words.
- Print awareness – how to handle a book, how to follow words on a page, and noticing print is all around them.
- Narrative skills – the ability to describe things and events and tell stories.
- Vocabulary – knowing the names of things.
- Print motivation – interest in and enjoyment of books.

Okay, you've read the facts. You may be thinking what can I do to help my children prepare for reading? Here are just a few suggestions I can offer:

- Start early! You can help your child gain these skills as early as birth. Holding your baby and reading to them is an important first step on the road to reading.
- Read – even if it's only 10 minutes at a time. If your child doesn't want to finish the story, don't force him or her to complete it. The nice thing about a book is that you can always pick it up later!
- You don't have to read the whole story or even use the text. Instead, you and your child can make up stories based on the pictures.
- Repeat favorite stories since repetition helps children retain information.
- Engage your child to become part of the story by asking him or her questions about what is going on in the story. Ask questions that need more than a "yes" or "no" answer and give them plenty of time to answer.
- Be goofy, play with words, and turn the book upside down. Now, you might wonder how these tips can help. Playing with words, such as breaking them apart or asking what words rhyme, can help children learn vocabulary and build thinking skills. Turning a book upside down and asking the child if it's the correct way builds print awareness.
- Have fun! Make reading enjoyable for you and your children. Let them play with the books. Don't worry if they put the book in their mouth because each time you sit down with them to read they will learn a book is for reading, not just for chewing on.

The best suggestion I can make: visit the library! Your child doesn't have a library card? Come on in and sign them up! Even babies can have a library card of their very own. All we need is a parent or guardian signature. Sharing books with children will not only help prepare them for school, but will also build literacy skills for a lifetime. To help, the library offers storytimes where your children can enjoy listening to books and participate in activities related to literacy. I encourage anyone – parent, teacher,

childcare worker – to stop by the library and ask about this program. Also, we would be happy to set up meetings for parents and childcare providers so anyone can learn more about early literacy and Every Child Ready to Read®.

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