

Reading for Pleasure and School Success

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Most young children will tell you that they love when someone reads to them. Did you know that besides the great pleasure of sitting on an adult's lap to hear a story, reading to children is one of the most effective things you can do to help them succeed in school?

Reading stimulates language abilities and overall brain development, and encourages imagination, curiosity and creativity. Developing early language skills sets a strong foundation for learning to read in school, whereas reading difficulties can lead to school failure and a diminished self-esteem. Children who are not read to are at a disadvantage and can easily fall behind in school.

Although the research about the importance of reading to young children is compelling, the majority of children under five years are **not** read to daily.

Reasons young children are not read to consistently:

- The challenges faced by low-income families who can't afford to buy books and don't have easy access to libraries. This is especially true for non-English language books.
- Some parents weren't read to when they were young, so they don't understand how important it is.
- Parents work long hours and are tired when they come home from work.
- Our electronic fast-paced society doesn't encourage reading books.
- Too many young children have televisions in their sleeping area or have it on in the home most of the day.

Things you can do to encourage the love of books and reading:

- Find a library and take out ten books every week. Ask the librarian for suggestions, and also let your kids pick books to which they're drawn.
- Implement family reading times. Older children can read to younger siblings, and parents can relax with a book or newspaper. Try taking turns reading out loud if you have older children.
- Do a book swap with your neighbors or friends. Everyone brings books they have outgrown and they leave with new books for their home library.
- Donate used books to schools, your doctor's office, place of worship, or a homeless shelter.
- Set limits on TV watching and electronic media use.
- Set a bedtime routine that includes reading. It reduces stress and creates a loving bond.
- Explore programs such as:
 - Reach Out and Read, where young children receive free books from their doctors (<http://www.reachoutandread.org>).
 - Raising a Reader, where pre-schools send children home with books for "book cuddling" (<http://www.raisingareader.org>).
 - Bring Me a Book, helping companies and non-profit organizations develop a lending library for children (<http://www.bringmeabook.org>).

Research shows that simply giving older children books to read may be as effective as attending summer school, so for pleasure and school success, move reading higher up on your family's priority list.