

Reading for Pleasure

Reading is one of the greatest pleasures a parent can share with their child.

Research also says it's one of the single most significant factors influencing both educational success and social skills.

Sharing a bedtime story seems like such a simple routine, yet it brings so many benefits – improved motor skills from learning to turn pages as well as mastery of objects, it develops concentration and memory, an empathy for others and an understanding of the world.

Research has shown that through reading, children develop social skills by playing out social simulations of real life – “What would I do?” “Why did they do that?” Reading not only extends children's imagination to worlds outside their own, but also provides time for reflection and processing, helping children find their place in the world.

Benefits for parents

For the parent, there are benefits as well:

- It's not really possible to read to a child and concentrate on anything else.
- It's a time to relax, engage and bond with the child one to one.
- Books are a tool or connection point to pass on your thoughts and values as a parent and society member.
- Reading leads to conversations between the parent and child about the book they are sharing, extending the child's vocabulary and word usage, helping them to communicate and to bond.
- The parent's undivided attention also contributes to the child forming a healthy self-esteem.
- Best of all, you will help your child to develop a love of reading, which will last a lifetime.

Ten tips about reading

Here are 10 tips about reading to your child:

1. It's never too early to begin reading to your child. As soon as your child can focus on the book and show some interest in what is happening around them, it's time to

- begin. Choose a book suited to the age of the child. As children grow older, they will tell you what they want to read.
2. Make reading time fun! Reading is a warm, cosy time shared together. Sit the child close beside you so you can see each other's facial reactions. Share laughter, wonder and exploration into other worlds. When the child is older, even when reading alone, those feelings of closeness and warmth will still be associated with the act of reading.
 3. Make reading an adventure with sight and sound. Use books with rhyme, repetition, and colourful artwork. Join in the author's playful use of words. Point out the story the illustrator tells us in pictures. Use animation - light and shade in your voice - to suit the characters and plot of the book. This is the time to show off the 'actor' we so often hide inside us!
 4. Engage the child with the story and the book itself. Young children enjoy books with built in participation. They love to open panels, look through 'windows' and poke fingers into holes in the book itself. Prediction is always fun. Use questions and answers to check what your child thinks about the story, such as "What's coming up?" "What can you see?" or more probing questions later on "What will they do next?" or "Why do you think he did that?"
 5. Make reading part of a routine. Many parents use reading as part of a bedtime routine, after showers, dinner and clean up time. It's a great way for fathers to bond with their children. But reading need not just be confined to bedtime. Work out the routine that suits you and adapt it to your child – in a special chair, at a particular time, as part of a settling process after play, as part of toilet training – whatever works for you and your child.
 6. Give the child power over what they read. "Which book would you like to read?" Children love having the power to choose. If they show lack of interest in a particular book, put it aside and let them choose another one. Start with books, which can be read in a single sitting. Children will want to read their favourite book over and over and over!
 7. Teach the child to read as you go incidentally. Trace your finger below the words, so that the child learns that a word in print is associated with sound, picture and meaning. Memorisation is one of the key ways children learn to read. Familiarity and the repetition of reading the same book is crucial to building children's confidence. Always encourage your child's attempts to read, even when they make mistakes. As children get older, they will read a favourite book along with

- you. Progress to reading alternating paragraphs and pages. Parents reading aloud to (and later with) their children can continue through primary school years.
8. Be creative and use the child's interests as a lever to reading. You may like to create a reading scrapbook in which you paste and label pictures of interest to your child, such as animals, cooking or machinery. This encourages and affirms your child's interests, as well as capitalising on them as a reading tool.
 9. Seek advice and help with your child's reading habit. You will find lots of willing sources – ask your local book store, children's librarian or teacher librarian for advice about what to read to your child. Your local library may hold read aloud sessions, and grandparents and friends may be happy to purchase books as gifts. Use online guides to find age suitable book titles from websites such as the CBCA's (Children's Book Council of Australia) Book of the Year Awards, Premier's and Prime Minister's Literary Awards, or choose books, which were your favourites as a child.
 10. Model reading as a part of everyday life. You can share reading real life objects, such as road signs, supermarket items, mail catalogues or recipe books...the opportunities are endless. As the child grows older and more independent as a reader, point out articles of interest in newspapers and magazines and continue talking about what you both read. If your child sees you reading as part of your everyday life, there is a high likelihood that they will also develop the reading habit.

Factors influencing children to read

There are many factors which influence children to read: being surrounded by text and reading materials, being part of a reading culture in their home environment as well as at school, the influence of their peers and significant others...but having parents read aloud to them as infants is one of the most important influences. The link between fathers who read and boys reading is particularly strong.

Former UK Children's Laureate, Michael Rosen (2008), sums up the importance of reading in the home: "Only when all children are in a book-loving environment will they achieve literacy, yes, but a lot more: a confidence in handling abstract ideas, an understanding of a multiplicity of viewpoint, and the complexity and diversity of human interaction that comes through reading widely and often."

The love of reading is one of the best gifts you can give to your child. All it takes is your time and patience, and the benefits will last a lifetime.

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