

## **Take the First Steps to Reading Success: Help Your Child Develop Pre-Reading Skills**

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The foundations of early literacy are laid long before children read their first book. As your child enters his or her third year, there are lots of activities you can do together to help your child learn the pre-reading skills that will help make your child a successful reader.

A key pre-reading skill is *print awareness*. Print awareness includes familiarity with how printed language looks and the knowledge that print carries meaning. Studies have shown that children's grasp of print knowledge is consistently associated with later achievements in reading.<sup>1</sup>

There are many characteristics of printed language for children to learn about as they get ready to read. As children develop print awareness, they begin to understand that there is a one to one correspondence between each word read and each word that they see printed on the page of a book. They begin to recognize the directionality of print and know how to hold a book correctly. They observe that we read from left to right. Children learn to distinguish between letters, words and sentences and to differentiate between upper and lowercase letters. They'll also learn about the different parts of books like the title, the author and the front and back of a book.

There is a lot to learn! Luckily, there is also a lot that you can do to help your child become comfortable and familiar with written language.

Firstly, set aside a special time everyday to read to your child and make reading an interactive activity. Before you begin a book, ask your child to identify the title and the author. Then have your child predict what the story might be about.

As you read, use your finger to point out words and sentences. Stop frequently to ask your child questions about the print they are looking at and what they think will happen next in a story. Try to get your child interested in the words and sentences you are reading and in understanding the story as a whole. When you get to the end of a paragraph or a page, ask your child where you should read next.

Your efforts can make a real difference in your child's understanding of what he or she is seeing. A 2008 study demonstrated that three to five-year-old children spent less than six percent of shared-reading

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<sup>1</sup> Zucker, Tricia A., Laura M. Justice, and Shayne B. Piasta. "Prekindergarten Teachers' Verbal References to Print During Classroom-Based, Large-Group Shared Reading." *Language, Speech, and Hearing Service in Schools* 40 (Oct. 2009): 376-392.

time looking at printed language when the adult reading to them did not point to the text. But when adults pointed to words as they read, children spent 25 percent of their reading time looking at print.<sup>2</sup>

When you're finished reading, go back and count how many letters are in a word or how many words are on a page. You can also point out which words are uppercase and which are lowercase. Help your child recognize words that occur frequently, like *the*, *is*, *a* and *you*. Encourage your child to find letters in the book that are in his or her name. And ask how the story corresponded to the predictions your child had before you began reading.

Point out rhyming words in the text, like cat and bat. Rhyming books and activities can help children learn the different sounds that make up words. Ask your child if she can think of another word that rhymes or make up a silly, imaginative word like, rat rhymes with zat!

Print awareness is also associated with your child's everyday environment. Print is everywhere – on billboards and signs, packages in the grocery store and in magazines and newspapers. As you draw your child's attention to these different examples of printed language, your child can start to understand that print has different functions based on context – the menu at a restaurant lists food, a stop sign gives instruction to drivers, a book tells a story.

Point out the print you and your child see throughout your day. Recognizing different logos, like the Target logo or the Tucan on a box of Fruit Loops, is a part of print awareness. As children begin to recognize logos, they learn to associate logos or a referent with meaning. This experience directly translates to their understanding that a single letter, has meaning – it has a name and a sound and is used to make up a word. When you're at the grocery store, show your child popular food labels and have her guess which is candy and which is a vegetable. Point to signs and billboards as you go about your daily activities.

Soon, your child will recognize that printed language is all around us. Your child will know that written language has meaning and will become more and more interested in understanding the words that he sees. He will ask "What does that say?" and become more engaged in the stories you read together.

Little by little, as you teach your child print awareness, you will reinforce the foundational skills your child needs to become a successful, independent reader. Be consistent, ask questions, encourage your child's natural curiosity, and soon your son or daughter will be ready to read.

The following websites provide resources to help develop your child's pre-reading skills:

StarFall [www.starfall.com](http://www.starfall.com)

Headsprout [www.headsprout.com](http://www.headsprout.com)

PBS [www.pbs.org/parents/bookfinder](http://www.pbs.org/parents/bookfinder)

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<sup>2</sup> Zucker, et al.