

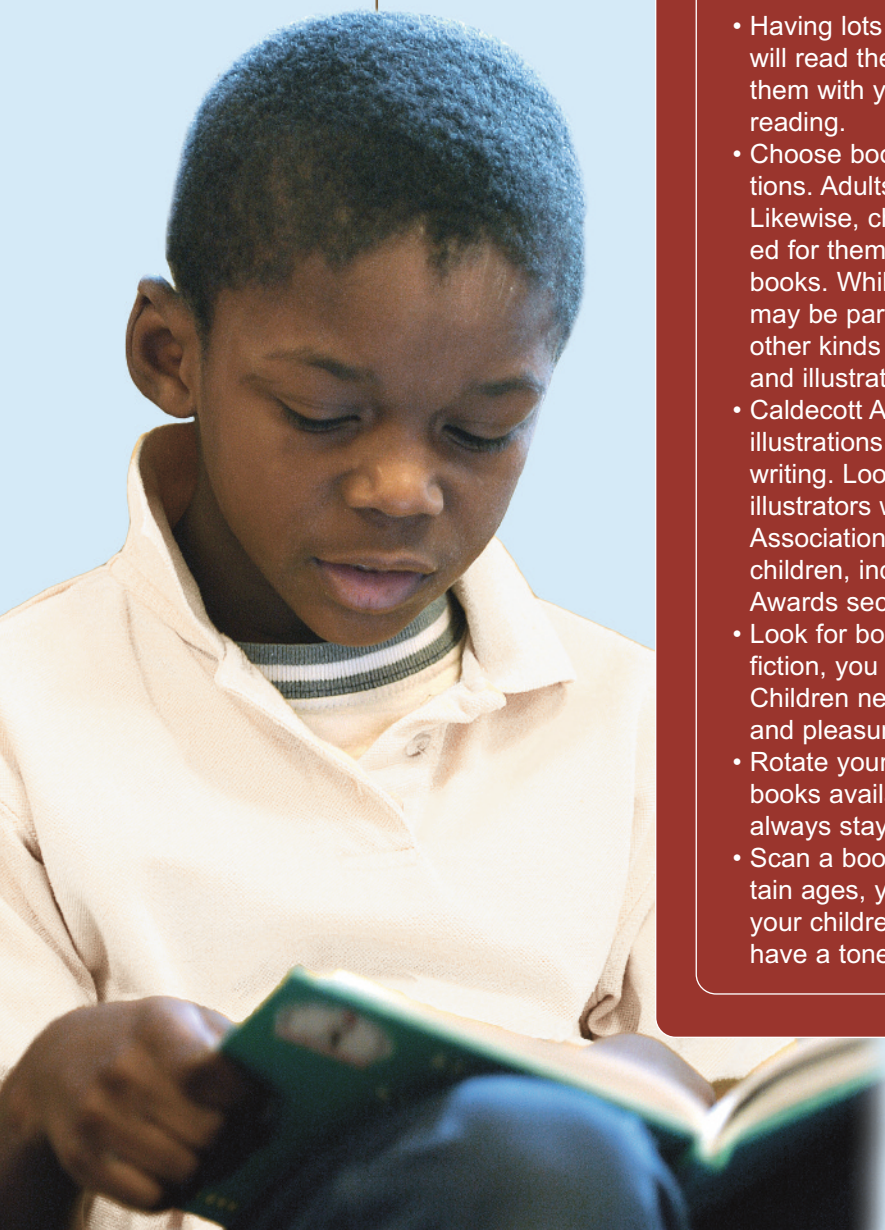
READING

Reading: A Primer for Parents

As a parent, you may be wondering how you can help your child love reading. Experts in learning and the brain tell us to start at the beginning of a child's life. Here are some tips from parents, compiled by Mary Henson, on giving your child a boost in learning through reading.

CHOOSING BOOKS

- Having lots of books in the home does not mean your child will read them or enjoy them. Choosing books and enjoying them with your child is the best way to encourage more reading.
- Choose books that include good writing and good illustrations. Adults do not randomly select an adult book to read. Likewise, children deserve to have high quality books selected for them as well as the opportunity to select their own books. While books about television and movie characters may be part of your library, your child needs access to many other kinds of books. Look for books from respected authors and illustrators.
- Caldecott Award books are recognized for their outstanding illustrations. Newberry Award books are recognized for their writing. Look for these award books and the authors and illustrators who create them. The American Library Association web page (www.ala.org) has reading lists for children, including award-winning books. Look under the Awards section of the web site.
- Look for books beyond your own interests. If you prefer fiction, you might want to select from nonfiction books first. Children need to learn to read for information, imagination, and pleasure.
- Rotate your books. Children get tired of having the same books available on the shelf. Some favorite books should always stay, but others should be rotated.
- Scan a book yourself before reading it to your child. At certain ages, you may avoid books that would introduce fears to your children. Also, books written for older children may have a tone or content that your child is not ready for yet.



READING TIME

- Households are so busy. It's important to make time for reading. Reading time can be short. There are different times of the day to read, not just bedtime.
- Keep books in the car. Children will soon begin to pick their own books for the car.
- Consider a library lunch for a treat. Children eat slower than most adults. So, after you eat and wash your hands, read to them for a library lunch. Library lunch is a great way to follow a visit to the local library.
- "Again, again!" Children love to hear favorite stories several times. Some children, to the frustration of their parents, want to hear a book numerous times. This is one way children learn. It is good for them.
- When you read together, get comfortable with a favorite blanket or stuffed animal.



Building on books

- Write down stories that your child tells you. A good time to write stories is when a child is drawing or has finished. The child may describe for you what is happening. After you write what your child says, you can read the story back to him or her.
- Consider journals for a variety of purposes. One journal may be dictated to the parent by the child. Another journal or sketch book may be completely managed by the child. Children enjoy having their own material for writing.
- Use drama to help children interpret stories. Puppets and play acting are natural extensions for stories. Act out the stories from books.
- Tell stories about your childhood to your children. Repeat these stories. After a time, children will request specific stories they love.
- Listen to stories by storytellers and practice retelling these stories. So many times, there are no books available but a story is needed.
- Change your voice as you read stories. Give children parts in the story to say. Whisper their parts in their ear for them to say.

- You can also just build onto the content of the story with a separate activity. For example, in Program 2 of Art to Heart, youngsters at the Smithsonian Early Enrichment Center read Eric Carle's *The Very Busy Spider* and then make spider amulet necklaces.

Helping your child learn to read

- Reading at home should not make children feel under pressure to perform. Just as in learning to talk and walk, reading does not happen all at once or necessarily in a linear fashion. There are skills for reading such as knowing the alphabet, knowing the sounds of certain letters, recognizing sight words or simple words, and recognizing patterns. But these skills alone do not define readiness to read. Wanting to read and loving books are just as important in helping children become fluent readers.
- If you become frustrated with your child's progress in becoming an independent reader, just remember that the overall goal is to help your child become a fluent

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TIPS ON LIBRARY USE

- Teach your child how to behave in the library. Go to a library that has children's materials.



- Get a big library bag. This will give you a way to collect many books at the library. You will also have a place to keep them and collect them for return.



- Look for other resources on the arts at the library. From music to DVDs to books to interactive computer programs, libraries can help us all expose our children to music, dance, art, and storytelling by the best in the world.

- Ask if your local library has a suggested reading list for your child. Search for books by the authors.

- Use oversized books available in the library with young children. There are beautiful coffee table books available on animals and foreign countries that are valuable for adults and children to look at together.

- Go to library story time. If you want to find books while you're there, go early and check them out before story time. There's usually a rush after story time to find books and check them out.



- For babies and very young children, take the stroller into the library.

reader who reads for pleasure and for specific purposes. You may also seek out the help of a teacher or reading specialist who can help you identify problems. Art to Heart identifies so many arts activities that provide critical skills for reading. If your child is having difficulty, consider what arts activity may enhance their reading ability.

- Use a variety of ABC books. There are so many great ABC picture books on many different subjects, including the arts.
- Don't force it. Reading instruction should feel natural. Learning to read is like finding answers to a secret code. It should be fun work.
- As your child learns the alphabet, say the sounds the letter makes in different words
- When you read concept books, such as a book about opposites, it is often a good time to help children examine a few letters, and then words. "H-O-T spells hot. This is the letter H. Can you point to the letter H? H is the first letter in hot."
- Guide your child to move in learning. You might use an ABC rug or note cards on the floor. "Jump on the O. O can be round like an oval."
- Spell your child's name for him or her frequently. Write it on paper and show it to your child. Children love their names.

- After your child learns the alphabet, read a few simple, repetitive books putting your finger on each word as you read.
- Your child may ask to read the book. Even if the book is memorized, compliment your child as a "reader."
- Consider reading confidence as a factor in your child becoming a reader. Just like learning to walk was about practice, experimentation and confidence, learning to read is a process in development.
- Talk about word families. Once your child is very comfortable with the alphabet and the sounds of the letters, introducing patterns in words and letters can springboard his or her reading. For example, the "at" family is very popular. Starting with a blank piece of paper, a parent can introduce the "at" family. "A-T spells at. Can you read 'at'? The 'at' family is a group of words that rhyme and have the A-T in them. If we put a B at the beginning, at becomes bat. If we put an f at the beginning, at becomes fat. What other words can you think of that rhyme with at?" After you have a great big "at" family, work with the child to write a story using the "at" family. The child can read the "at" words while the parent reads the other words in the story.

AT HOME

- It's important that your child see parents read, too. Your child will benefit from seeing you read newspapers, books, and magazines for information and pleasure. Select books for reading time together that you both enjoy.
- Make your home a literature-rich environment. By example, children see that reading is for pleasure and for specific purposes.
- Put books where children can reach them and choose for themselves.



- Teach your children how to take care of books. Use board books for babies and toddlers. Children love to touch books themselves. With more delicate books and active hands, hold your child on your lap and read to them.
- Find books that your child likes. In reading for pleasure, it's OK to stop reading at the child's request. This is part of developing a reader's taste. Most adults don't finish every single book they start. Adults select what they like. Allow your children to select what they like.
- Every child is an emerging independent reader. Believe it and take steps to help your child view reading as a necessary and pleasurable activity.
- We develop an attention span for reading. Limit interruptions from the telephone and television. Devote your full attention to this special time together. Match the length of the reading time to the child's interest and attention span.
- Use a combination of reading levels in reading aloud to your child.