

Fun Ideas for Kids and Parents to Improve Reading and Writing Skills

The Early Years: Birth to Preschool

Tot Talk -- What's "old hat" to you can be new and exciting to toddlers and preschoolers. When you talk about everyday experiences, you help children connect their world to language and enable them to go beyond that world to new ideas.

- ✓ As you get dinner ready, talk to your child about things that are happening. When your 2- or 3-year-old "helps" by taking out all the pots and pans, talk about them. "Which one is the biggest?" "Can you find a lid for that one?"


"What color is this one?"

- ✓ When walking down the street and your toddler or preschooler stops to collect leaves, stop and ask questions that require more than a "yes" or "no" answer. "Which leaves are the same?" "Which leaves are different?" "What else grows on trees?"
- ✓ Ask "what if" questions. "What would happen if we didn't shovel the snow?" "What if that butterfly lands on your nose?"
- ✓ Answer your child's endless "why" questions patiently. When you say, "I don't know, let's look it up," you show how important books are as resources for answering questions.
- ✓ After your child tells you a story, ask questions so you can understand better. That way children learn how to tell complete stories and know you are interested in what they have to say.
- ✓ Expose your child to varied experiences -- trips to the library, museum, or zoo; walks in the park; or visits with friends and relatives. Surround these events with lots of comments, questions, and answers.

Moving into Reading: Preschool through Grade Two

World of Words -- Here are a few ways to create a home rich in words.

- ✓ Label the things in your child's pictures. If your child draws a picture of a house, label it with "This is a house," and put it on the refrigerator.
- ✓ Have your child watch you write when you are making a shopping list or a "what to do" list. Say the words aloud and carefully print each letter.

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- ✓ Look at newspapers and magazines with your child. Find an interesting picture and show it to your child as you read the caption aloud.
 - ✓ Create a scrapbook. Cut out pictures of people and places and label them.


Write On -- Writing helps a child become a better reader, and reading helps a child become a better writer.

- ✓ Ask your child to dictate a story to you. It could include descriptions of your outings and activities, along with mementos such as fall leaves and flowers, birthday cards, and photographs. Older children can do these activities on their own.

Family Stories -- Family stories enrich the relationship between parent and child.

- ✓ Tell your child stories about your parents and grandparents. You might even put these stories in a book and add old family photographs.
- ✓ Have your child tell you stories about what happened on special days, such as holidays, birthdays, and family vacations.

P.S. I Love You -- Something important happens when children receive and write letters. They realize that the printed word has a purpose.

- ✓ Send your child little notes (by putting them in a pocket or lunch box, for example). When your child shows you the note, read it aloud with expression. Some children will read the notes on their own.
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