

When Should You Begin Teaching Your Child To Read?

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When Should You Begin Teaching Your Child To Read?

By Deanna Mascle

It is never too early to begin teaching your child to read, or at least laying the foundation for early literacy skills, and it can definitely be left too late!

If you are not sure then think about this. Statistically, more American children suffer long-term life-long harm from the process of learning to read than from parental abuse, accidents, and all other childhood diseases and disorders combined. In purely economic terms, reading related difficulties cost our nation more than the war on terrorism, crime, and drugs combined.

Reading problems are a further challenge to our world by contribute significantly to the perpetuation of socio-economic, racial and ethnic inequities. However it is not just poor and minority children who struggle with reading. According to the 2002 national report card on reading by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), most of our children (64%) are less than proficient in reading even after 12 years of our attempts to teach them.

Even without knowing these worrisome statistics we are aware that reading proficiency is essential to success—not only academically but in life. As the American Federal of Teachers states: "No other skill taught in school and learned by school children is more important than reading. It is the gateway to all other knowledge. Teaching students to read by the end of third grade is the single most important task assigned to elementary schools. Those who learn to read with ease in the early grades have a foundation on which to build new knowledge. Those who do not are doomed to repeated cycles of frustration and failure."

More than any other subject or skill, our children's futures are determined by how well they learn to read.

Reading is absolutely fundamental. It has been said so often that it has become meaningless but it does not negate its truth. In our society, in our world, the inability to read consigns children to failure in school and consigns adults to the lowest strata of job and life opportunities.

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And just when we thought the stakes could get no higher, over the last decade, educational research findings have discovered that how well children learn to read has other, even more life-shaping, consequences. Most children begin learning to read during a profoundly formative phase in their development. As they begin learning to read, they're also learning to think abstractly. They are learning to learn and they're experiencing emotionally charged feelings about who they are and how well they are learning.

What does that mean? Most children who struggle with reading blame themselves. Day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, the process of learning to read teaches these children to feel ashamed of themselves—ashamed of their minds—ashamed of how they learn.

And the sad truth is that they have nothing to be ashamed about. As Dr. Grover Whitehurst, Director Institute of Education Sciences, Assistant Secretary of Education, U.S. Department of Education (2003) says: "Reading failure for nearly every child is not the child's failure; it's the failure of policy makers, the failure of schools, the failure of teachers and the failure of parents. We need to

reconceptualize what it means to learn to read and who's responsible for its success if we're going to deal with the problem."

Do you want to wait for the policy makers to find a solution? Do you trust that they will? Or would you rather make sure that the job is done right by taking charge yourself?

I know what my answer is because I know first-hand from witnessing my brother's life-long difficulties what an irrevocable impact a reading struggle early in life can make. It can mark your child for life!

I'm not promising that your child can learn to read early or that they won't experience difficulty. After all, there is a significant number of children suffering from learning disabilities. These children will struggle. However, early instruction may ease their suffering and make the struggle a bit easier to handle. At the very least you will know that you did everything you could to help your child—and your child will know that as well. That cannot be wasted effort!

And you have a head-start on every educator because you know your child—her temperament, her strengths, and her weaknesses. You are the person best equipped to begin teaching your child.

So we come back to the central question—when should your child's reading education begin? Traditional American Education models call for teaching a child to read between the ages of 7–9. Obviously we cannot begin teaching a newborn how to read. However, we can begin in infancy to lay the foundation for literacy which will in the end make your child a stronger reader.

Literacy is defined as an individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English, compute, and solve problems, at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual, and in society.

Many of the simple things we do at home with our children support the development of literacy so you are already working to make your child more literate even if you are not actively beginning the process

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to teach your child to read. This includes simple activities such as reading to your child, reciting nursery rhymes, and singing songs.

But what if you do want to become a more active participant? There are many things you can do and it doesn't mean you need to invest hundreds of dollars in an expensive reading program. You don't actually need to spend much money at all to teach your child to read at home—or at the least prepare your child well for the beginning of reading instruction in school. Most parents already have the tools you need in your home to begin today!

This is why I stress that it is never too early to begin—if you work with your child's development and make learning fun and interesting as well as challenging.

My essential strategy as an educator is to create learning opportunities and then to get out of the way of my students so they can learn. Learning is an active experience that should fully engage the participant. I believe that when I am "teaching" that the student is only passively involved in the learning process. I see myself much more as a guide and a resource than a teacher in my classroom. I have taken this approach with my son's education and it has been very successful.

We have various learning toys and aids in our home and there are many lessons taking place each day (at home and away) but I have never drilled him on facts or even used flashcards.

If you can find ways to make learning fun and exciting—something that your child actually wants to do with you—then begin as soon as possible.

Your child will have plenty of opportunity for dry lectures, mind-numbing repetitive drills, and boring lessons as they grow older so don't even go there. If you can't make learning fun and more like play than work then don't even go there. Trust your child's education to the professionals and hope for the best. Remember, there are many wonderful teachers out there so your child is not doomed to failure even if you don't intervene. However, the system is not a success and it is likely that at some point during the process your child may be adversely affected by it! That's why I take an active role in my child's education.

<http://PreschoolersLearnMore.com>

newsletter offers a free tutorial to help you teach your child to read

as well as other preschool resources at

<http://teachyourchildtoread.info>

The Laid Back Parents Guide To Teaching Your Child To Read

By Carrie Lauth

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At first I thought of titling this article "The Lazy Parent's Guide" but then I realized that most parents aren't lazy, but they may have a slightly different philosophy about children and learning.

If you're a big reader yourself or if you're homeschooling, you're probably concerned about how to teach your child to read. Reading is one of the most important skills a person can learn, and a great joy in life.

My laid-back methods of teaching a child to read:

1) Be a reader yourself

Children naturally want to copy adult behavior. If your kids see you often with your nose in a book, they will probably begin to wonder what is so interesting about this activity.

2) Read to your kids

This is probably a huge no-brainer. Read to your kids early and often. And don't read in order to "teach your child how to read". I believe that the best way to teach your child to read is to NOT teach your child to read!

Read to your child because you enjoy it and it's fun. Some forward-thinking education experts believe that the teaching of reading is mostly what prevents reading. After all, don't adults read as a means to an end? Because they want to learn something or because they enjoy the act of reading?

3) Don't worry so much

Don't worry about a right or wrong way of reading to your child.

If your preschool-age child isn't interested in books yet, or won't sit still for more than 30 seconds to finish a story, don't fret.

If your 3 year old wants to point at pictures or turn to favorite pages and ask a million questions, don't fuss.

Children learn in different ways than adults do and I don't think anyone knows enough about the human mind to figure it all out. Make reading together pleasant, not stressful.

And don't worry about how old your child is when they learn to read. If they're reading at 3 or at 8, studies show that it makes little difference in their intelligence or ability by the time they reach middle school.

4) Pick topics that interest your child

My oldest son's interest in reading really skyrocketed when we started the Series of Unfortunate

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Events books by Lemony Snicket. We would sit for hours and read aloud together when he was only 5 or 6. Visit Lemony Snicket's Series of Unfortunate Events for more information about these books.

These books were technically above his age level, but I advise you to forget all that.

John Holt, the legendary educator and author, has been quoted as saying:

"It's nice to have children's books, but far too many of them have too much in the way of pictures. When children see books, as they do in the family where the adults read, with pages and pages and pages of print, it becomes pretty clear that if you're going to find out what's in those books, you're going to have to read from that print. I don't think there's any way to make reading interesting to children in a family in which it isn't interesting to adults."

So let your child pick books from the library or bookstore and don't concern yourself about whether the titles are "age appropriate".

5) Strictly limit TV and other electronic media

A growing body of evidence is pointing to the fact that TV, video games and computer usage are hurting our children's interest in reading. TV and video games rewire the brain and teach it to be lazy. Reading is much more work, because the mind can't be passive while engaging in it (unlike plug-in entertainment). Kids who get bored are more likely to pick up a book.

Above all, have fun snuggling up with your child and enjoy reading together!

Carrie Lauth publishes an informative newsletter for Moms doing things the natural way. Get your free issues at

<http://www.natural-moms.com>

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