

## Helping Preschoolers Develop Early Reading Skills

Written by By Jayne Matthews  
Thursday, 29 November 2012 00:00

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Learning to read does not come naturally, says Margie Gillis, Ed.D. “It must be taught. The earlier you begin, the greater your child’s chances are of becoming a fluent reader.” While reading may not be intuitive, it is a skill that all successful students must master— the sooner the better.

Consider some of the benefits preschool literacy documented by the National Commission on Reading, American Early Childhood Literacy Gap Commission and the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative Report respectively:

- The single most significant factor influencing a child's early educational success is an introduction to books and being read to at home prior to beginning school.
- Reading to a child aged three to five years builds alphabetic knowledge, print convention concepts and phonological awareness— skills that are fundamental to literacy.
- At least 50 percent of the educational achievement gaps between poor and non-poor children already exist when entering kindergarten.

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To help prepare preschoolers for successful written language processing and reading comprehension, Dr. Ellis has created 12 easy to follow activities. She advises parents to keep it fun by initiating these and other learning activities while riding in the car, taking a walk or just playing.

- Syllable Recognition: Clapping so kids can hear how many syllables a word contains. Words like bi-cy-cle and el-e-phant engage attention.

- Rhyming: Reading, rhyming books is fun. So is making up nonsense rhymes or playing “I see something that rhymes with hat.”

- Alliteration: Try Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers with three or four-year-olds, calling their attention to hearing the “p” sound at the beginning of the word.

- Oral language comprehension: Ask your child to retell a story you have read, or to repeat a sentence. Using a puppet to demonstrate delights your kids. If your child has difficulty with words out of context or multiple meanings (confuses letter of the alphabet

with a letter that is mailed), explain it.

- Abstract words: Demonstrate abstract words such as prepositions. For example, “Let’s put Danny’s shoe under, next to, and on the table.”

- Background knowledge: Relate to real experiences. To understand a story about the zoo, it helps to have been there, or to have seen a zoo on TV.

- Sentence structure: Explain complexities, particularly for sentences that are long and have several parts. Some children need help understanding that “I went to the store after playing in the park” can be expressed as “After playing in the park, I went to the store.”

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- Oral language expression: Children that learn to talk late are at a disadvantage. Give them the chance to express themselves. Talking with a puppet may help.
  
- Vocabulary: Learning to read requires knowledge of vocabulary (recognizing what words mean) and verbal reasoning abilities. Ask your child to explain things such as why it gets cold at night.
  
- Print awareness: This includes recognizing that the words on the page-not the pictures-carry the message, and that words are read left to right and top to bottom.
  
- Letter recognition: To help kids identify letters with confidence, play with 3-D letters, watch Sesame Street together, look at alphabet books and notice familiar letters in signs and names, particularly the child's own.
  
- Phonological and phonemic awareness: Children begin by recognizing and producing words that rhyme. Nursery rhymes and poetry are great for this. As they move into Kindergarten the focus shifts to individual sounds in words. For example, "What sound do you hear at the end of fish?" "Tell me the three sounds in fish."

*Jayne Matthews-Hopson is a writer and academic advocate. Education Matters because "only the educated are free." Your thoughts, comments and suggestions are welcomed at: [www.baltimoretimes-online.com](http://www.baltimoretimes-online.com).*