

Building Readers®

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Rochester Community Schools

Give your child the 'write' stuff to prepare for writing

Today's scribbler may become tomorrow's scribe! In fact, studies show that preschoolers who are encouraged to scribble now are more likely to become confident writers later. They may have stronger language skills, too.



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To boost your rookie writer's earliest efforts:

- **Respect his eagerness.** Youngsters want to write long before they know how. So give him lots of chances to try. And make sure he has easy access to crayons and paper.
- **Respond to his words.** His "writing" may not make sense to you, but it does to him. So respond to what he's trying to say. Research shows it's a terrific way to encourage him.
- **Model how you use writing.** Make lists. Say to your child, "We need milk. I'm going to write that down." Have your child "write" with you.

Source: Dr. Wayne D. Lance, "Teaching Writing: Preschool, Kindergarten, and First Grade," International Children's Education, www.iched.org/cms/scripts/page.php?site_id=iched&item_id=teach_writing_prek-1.

Get on the path to school success

So what if your youngster is only in preschool? There's still plenty you can do now to help her succeed in "real" school later. To put your child on the path to academic success:

- **Set the bar high.** Let your child know that you expect her to do well in school.
- **Create a learning-friendly home.** Surround your child with books, paper and crayons.
- **Encourage her.** Be your child's number-one fan! Praise her when she does well, and comfort her when she stumbles.
- **Make school a priority.** Show your child that preschool is important. Attend school events. Also, read any handouts she brings home.

Plan for good attendance



Don't let your preschooler dawdle her way to poor attendance. To get your child out the door and to school on time:

- **Prep the night before.** Pack her lunch and load her backpack before you head to bed.
- **Limit her choices.** Avoid getting stalled by the "What would you like to wear?" question. Instead, give her just two outfits from which to choose.

Find reading help online



Put your budding bookworm on the road to reading. Download free resources from the International Reading Association (www.reading.org/resources/tools/parent.html). It's an excellent resource for nurturing your child's language learning.

Choose which tales to tell



Wow your little reader by telling him a great story. Although any tale will work if you're enthusiastic, some of the best stories have:

- **Vivid images.** Spin a yarn that "paints a picture" for your child.
- **A solid message.** Find a story that will reinforce your values.
- **Compelling characters.** Don't bore your child with wimpy tales. Tell him a story that really pops!

Source: Chris King, "What Makes a Good Story?" Storytelling Power, www.creativekeys.net/StorytellingPower/article1004.html.

What you should know about reading problems

Have you been told your child has a reading problem? Don't despair! Although it's critical to get him help, it's also important to remember that:

- **The earlier a reading difficulty** is diagnosed, the better.
- **Kids with reading difficulties** can (and do) succeed in school and beyond.
- **Having a reading difficulty** does not mean your child will never learn to read. It just means he may need to be taught in a different way.

It's also helpful to remember that your child isn't alone. Of kids diagnosed with a learning problem, roughly 85 percent have issues with reading or language-learning skills.

Source: "Difficulties with Reading," *Misunderstood Minds*, PBS.org, www.pbs.org/wgbh/misunderstoodminds/readingdiffs.html.

Encourage discussion with your preschooler

The more kids talk and use language, the easier it is for them to learn to read. Open-ended questions (those that can't be answered with one word) are especially helpful for starting conversations. For example, "What do you think will happen next?" Here are some other ideas:

- **Talk to yourself.** Let your child hear you reflect on your activities. While working a puzzle, you might say, "I'm looking for pieces with straight edges." Then invite your child to help you.
- **Give descriptions.** Mention what your child is doing: "That's a bright sun you're coloring." This helps her



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connect words to real things. It may spark discussion now or later.

- **Affirm what your child says.** "Yes, Daddy is home!" She'll see that what she says is correct and important. Then she'll want to say more.



Books to delight your early reader

Pure Power by Craig Robert Carey (Scholastic). What does it take to get a big, dirty job done? Power! And these trucks, loaders and skycranes have it, so look out. They're revving and raring to go.

Tea for Ruby by Sarah Ferguson (Simon & Schuster). Ruby tries her best to learn table manners, but is very clumsy. Then she gets invited to tea with the Queen. Will she be able to learn her manners in time?

You don't always need books to build literacy skills



When it comes to reading activities, don't be afraid to think outside the book. Here are some clever, "book-free" ways to have wordy fun with your child:

- **Do word-finds.** Ask your child's preschool teacher for a few simple word-finds you can do at home. When your child completes one, hang it on the fridge.
- **Go on a nature walk.** Once you return, craft a story about your grand adventure with your child. (If it's too cold to go outside, take a "virtual" walk online.)
- **Put on a puppet show.** Use old socks to make silly puppets. Together, invent a tale for your puppets to tell.



Q. Should I correct my preschooler every time he uses poor grammar?

A. Instead of correcting him, try restating his words. For instance, if he says, "That boy *don't* look happy," you could say, "You're right. That boy *doesn't* look happy." With this approach, you'll be giving him a chance to hear proper grammar without making him feel like he made a mistake.

Do you have a question about reading? Email readingadvisor@parent-institute.com.

"Reading every day, seven days a week, has made me the best that I can be."

—Edward James Olmos

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