

**Literacy Skills:** The Roots of Reading Start at Birth

Learning to read and write doesn't start in kindergarten or first grade. Developing language and literacy skills begins at birth, through everyday loving interactions—sharing books, telling stories, singing songs, and talking with parents, family, caregivers, teachers, and friends.

**WHAT YOU CAN DO:**

- **Make sharing books part of every day.** Read or share stories at bedtime, on the bus, or waiting at the doctor's office.
- **Don't worry about finishing the story!** Young children can only pay attention for a few minutes. What's most important for young children is that reading together is a joyful experience, as this nurtures a love of books and, ultimately, reading.
- **Talk about the pictures.** You do not have to read the exact words to tell a story. You can even sing about the pictures—adding a melody engages children and also helps with learning new words and reading comprehension.
- **Let your child explore the book in whatever way he likes.** Babies often explore by mouthing or banging books, so be sure to provide chunky board books that are safe for them. Older children may want to be in control of turning the pages. The more involved the child is in the book-sharing experience, the greater the learning.
- **Point out the actual words in the book.** Run your finger along the words as you read them. This helps them understand that the printed word has meaning.
- **Make the story come alive.** Create voices for the story characters, and use actions to tell the story.
- **Make it personal.** Connect the content of the book to your child's life. Talk about your own family, pets, or community when the book you are reading is about these kinds of things.
- **Ask questions about the story, and encourage your child to ask questions, too!** Use the story to engage in conversation and to talk about familiar activities and objects.
- **Encourage your child to tell the story.** Children as young as 3 years old can memorize a story and can also make up their own stories, which builds imagination and thinking skills.
- **Read and tell stories over and over.** It is very common for young children to want to hear a story over and over. It is through repetition that children gain mastery over the content. When young children first view a page of a book, they focus on one aspect of it; but when the book is repeated, they focus on different features of what they are viewing. Over time, they start to build a more complete memory by piecing together information from the multiple repetitions.
- **Use books and stories to help children work through fears and challenging situations.** Hearing about how characters they relate to cope with difficult feelings and experiences can help children manage their own challenges.