

## Easy Ways to Help Your Child Learn to Read

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**by: Leslie Blair**

If a child can't read well by the end of third grade, he or she likely won't become a strong reader. Parents as well as teachers can play a big role in helping children develop strong reading skills.

There are lots of easy ways that parents can help their children build reading skills. According to the [National Institute for Literacy](#), every minute you spend reading and talking with your child pays off. For example, while walking through the neighborhood with your child, ask her questions about what you see along the way. Help her hear the sounds in words when you talk. For example, you can point out words that begin with the same sound, like *bicycle* and *ballet*, or rhyming words, like *kitten* and *mitten*.

Stacey Joyner, a reading specialist and program associate with [Southwest Educational Development Laboratory's \(SEDL\) Texas Comprehensive Center](#) says, "By helping your child learn to hear the different sounds in words, you are supporting one of the critical skills that children need in order to learn to read well. That skill is called *phonemic awareness*. By hearing and saying rhymes, singing songs, and clapping syllables, children focus on the sounds in the words."

Parents can also help children learn the ABCs and the sounds each letter makes. The knowledge of how letters represent sounds is called *phonics*, and is also a critical skill that children need to read well. Children can make the leap from talking to reading after they learn that written letters stand for the sounds they hear in words. You can begin by saying or singing the alphabet, reading alphabet books, and pointing out letters in the alphabet in words and names—using your child's name is a powerful hook.

You also can play games with your child to help him make the connection between words and sounds. Point out words to your child on billboards, cereal boxes, birthday cards, and signs. Say the words out loud and help your child sound them out.

An important skill is building vocabulary. Joyner says, "Learning new words begins early. A child learns most new words by hearing them in context and developing an understanding of what they mean. Meaningful conversations with your child about things in her world—toys, friends, school—help to develop language and understanding.

The ability to identify words and comprehend quickly and accurately means your child is gaining language *fluency*. By listening to your child read his favorite books over and over again, you can help him become more fluent.

Another aspect of reading is *comprehension*, or understanding what is read. When reading a story to your child, help her understand by asking questions and talking about the story as you go along. The questions can be as simple as "What do you think will happen next?"

Spending a little time every day talking and reading with your child can make all the difference.

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### **Resources**

- The National Center for Family Literacy
- Reading Is Fundamental
- Reading Rockets

<http://www.pta.org/programs/content.cfm?ItemNumber=1411>