



EARLY LITERACY MATTERS:

OUR TOP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
ENCOURAGING YOUR CHILD TO ENJOY
READING AT A YOUNG AGE



WHY DOES READING MATTER?

Reading is one of the most difficult—and yet one of the most important—skills that your child will learn. Children who have the most opportunity to interact with language—from infancy to early elementary school—are the most likely to develop into skilled readers and writers for the rest of their lives.

Children learn to read once they are able to identify letters—or combinations of letters—and connect those letters to sounds. And although many believe that learning to read is a natural process, decades of scientific research has revealed that reading doesn't come naturally.

Despite the challenge, the stakes to learn to read are high: Children who don't learn to read by the end of third grade are likely to remain poor readers for the rest of their lives, and consequently fall behind in other academic areas as well. Research on the importance of reading finds that children who struggle with reading are more likely to drop out of high school, end up in the criminal justice system, and live in poverty.

KEY BENEFITS OF EARLY LITERACY DEVELOPMENT INCLUDE:

- Stronger long-term trajectory. Literacy is one of the most significant indicators of future academic success. Research finds that students who are not proficient in reading by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school.
- Cognitive and language development. Even infants can benefit from hearing their parents or caregivers read aloud to them. One 2013 study found that babies who are read to scored higher in language skills and cognitive development. Another study discovered that these early opportunities for learning can extend through a child's life: Verbal interactions at a young age were found to result in increased language ability and IQ as a teen.
- Increased vocabulary. When you read to your child at a young age, it expands and deepens their vocabulary. One study estimates that children who are regularly read to during the first 2,000 days of their lives are exposed to 1.4 million more words than children who aren't read to.
- Creativity, imagination, and listening skills. The process of reading results in deepened creativity, imagination, and listening skills for young children.



HELPING YOUR CHILD LEARN TO READ

To help your young reader become more confident and develop a love of reading, you can support your child by reading to them aloud, reiterating phonetics, and having fun with words and language.

READ ALOUD TO YOUR CHILD.

This is one of the best ways to help your child—especially if they are in preschool. Research finds that for children as young as just nine months old, reading aloud can be highly beneficial. They'll gain a deeper vocabulary, learn new sounds, and enjoy quality time spent together.

If you wonder if your child is too young to be read to, fear not: a 2017 study from an NYU pediatrics department researcher found that reading to your children soon after birth boosts reading and vocabulary development four years later.

When your child gets older, transition to reading with your child. This means making reading an interactive and exploratory activity. As you move throughout the pages, periodically pause to ask your child open-ended questions and give them time and space to share their thoughts.



A few sample questions might include:

What do you think is going to happen when we turn the page?

What do you think this character might be feeling right now?

What are you noticing about this character?

PROVIDE READING MATERIALS.

Being able to access reading materials in a variety of forms—from comic books to magazines to newspapers—plays an important role in developing life-long readers. Research from the Educational Testing Service determined that the children who were most proficient in reading were those with a plentiful amount of reading material at home.

CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT THAT FOSTERS READING.

One of the best ways to make sure your child develops a love of reading is to make reading a regular activity in your home.



Whether that means you spend time reading in front of your children, or you have a standard “family reading hour” at a certain time each day, carving out time and space for reading is a gift that will only help your child over time. Far too many parents, especially those who were big or early readers themselves, may put pressure on their children to enjoy reading—but make sure to let your child set the pace.

TEACH PHONICS.

In kindergarten, your child will likely learn phonics: the names of each letter and what sounds they make. But you can help your child learn this at home by heightening their awareness of each sound that makes up a letter.

Try stretching out one word to highlight each individual sound—so instead of saying, “Hey, look at that dog,” you can draw out the word: duh-aw-guh. This can help your child as they learn more about phonics and reading, eventually gaining the tools they need to be fluent readers.

MODEL THE BEHAVIOR.

One of the most important acts you can do for your child is to model the behavior—and that applies to reading! If you want your child to read—and yet never model the behavior for your child—it will create tension and difficulties down the road.

Whether you’re a lifelong reader or not, create space and opportunity to read daily or at least a few times a week. When you model the behavior you expect of your child, they will begin to understand that reading is an enjoyable activity they can continue as they grow up.

CHOOSE DIFFERENT TIMES OF THE DAY TO READ—AND A DIVERSE SELECTION OF BOOKS.

It’s easy to get into the habit of reading to your child at the same time every day—but to encourage engagement, incorporate reading into different parts of your day. You can read a short story over breakfast or when your child returns home from child care.

While it’s great to choose books that reflect your child’s reality, it’s also important to read a diverse selection of books—especially those that center on characters of different ethnicities, experiences, and childhoods.

Research in neuroscience suggests that reading fiction can help people develop empathy, theory of mind, and critical thinking skills. When your child is exposed to characters with different life experiences, they'll become better at understanding other people—and being able to find connections and shared experiences between one another.

HOW WE HELP

One Place is dedicated to providing access to books and resources that support language and literacy development—so we can establish the next generation of readers. Early literacy activities that support brain development include reading with and to your child, talking to your child, and singing songs together.

We offer a number of programs to enhance early literacy, including:

- **Dolly Parton's Imagination Library:** Smart Start and Dolly Parton's Imagination Library are working together to provide books to North Carolina's youngest children. The Imagination Library is a book gifting program for children from birth to age 5 that mails a new, high-quality, age-appropriate book each month directly to the homes of registered children at no cost. Register at www.oneplaceonslow.org/dpil
- **Story Walks at the Park:** One Place collaborates with Onslow County Parks and Recreation to maintain five permanent Story Walks at the Park. A Story Walk has pages of children's books mounted on posts that line a path. They combine early literacy with physical activity in a natural learning environment. Each park features a different story every month. Visit Onslow Pines Park, Hubert By-Pass Park, Deppe Park, Steed Park, or Stump Sound Park to enjoy a Story Walk.
- **Little Free Libraries:** One Place maintains more than 70 Little Free Libraries throughout the county in an effort to provide access to books to the entire community. Readers of all ages are encouraged to "Take a book, return a book." Whether you donate a book or borrow a book, Little Free Libraries allow us all to make literacy a focus in Onslow County. [**Find a Little Free Library near you!**](#)
- **Community Book Drives:** For more than 20 years, One Place has coordinated an annual book drive collaborating with local businesses such as banks, restaurants, realtors, schools, and early learning centers to collect and distribute more than 125,000 books. We accept gently used books at our book drop located at 900 Dennis Road, Jacksonville, NC. Interested in hosting a book drive? Contact Lisa Davis at lisa.davis@oneplaceonslow.org.



LEARN MORE ABOUT ONE PLACE

One Place is a 501(c)3 nonprofit that has been serving families of Onslow County and surrounding communities for more than 20 years. We strive to improve the lives of children and families by connecting them with high-quality resources for child care, early education, and child abuse prevention and intervention.

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