

Tip Sheet for Parents: Preparing Preschoolers For Future Reading Success

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The saying, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” is as true for reading success as any other problem your child might face. Did you know that 15 to 20% of all people have a specific reading disability called **dyslexia**? While this can be frightening to think about when you have a young child, you should know that nearly all children with dyslexia can become successful readers. For children with dyslexia, the keys to future reading success are: 1) early recognition of the problem, and 2) reading instruction with the best methods for their specific challenges.

Learning to read is not as natural for children as learning to talk. It is a complex task that requires good teaching and extended practice for several years to become truly proficient. The lists below provide information that will help parents know what to watch for, and how to work with their preschoolers for future reading success.

General Risk Factors

- Family history of dyslexia or serious reading and spelling difficulty
- Child history of delayed speech and language development

Specific early warning signs include persistent problems with:

- Pronouncing words correctly (e.g., aminal for animal, bana for banana)
- Rhyming
- Learning names of shapes and colors

- Learning letter names
- Learning letter sounds
- Separating and blending word parts (e.g., syllables and individual letter sounds)
- Learning to write own name
- Fine-motor skills, such as coloring, writing, and tying shoes

What Parents Can Do

- Read to your child daily, starting at about 6 months of age
- Keep reading activities short and fun for parent and child
- Read different kinds of books: books that tell interesting stories or introduce new concepts, books with rhyming or repetitive word patterns, and books that emphasize alphabet letters
- Point to each word as you read, or move your finger across the line of print from left to right as you read
- Pause frequently during reading to ask your child questions or have your child say the word that comes next
- Engage your child in language play, with rhyming words or words that all start with the same sound
- Introduce new vocabulary words through daily, extended conversations with your child and during reading activities
- Use routine activities such as mealtime and car trips to talk about new words, discuss something interesting that has happened, and to share ideas and feelings
- At age 3 to 4 years, begin talking about letter names and letter sounds
- At age 4 to 5 years, begin encouraging your child to read and write his or her own first name.

- At age 4 to 5 years, encourage your child to begin learning letter names and some letter sounds.
- Provide magnet alphabet letters or letter blocks for play.
- Provide markers, crayons, pencils and paper to encourage drawing and beginning writing
- Place your child in a high-quality preschool program if possible, to develop cognitive, social, emotional, language, literacy, and motor skills that will prepare him or her for kindergarten.

This is just a sample of the language and literacy activities that you can do with your child. Just about any activity that builds vocabulary, listening skills, and understanding of print will be beneficial.

These activities are important to prepare every child for reading success in kindergarten. They are especially important for children who show risk factors or early symptoms of possible dyslexia.

If you become concerned about your child's development in these or other skills, speak with your physician and contact the local public school system or other community agencies for guidance and evaluation.

Doing these activities will not guarantee reading success for your child. However, by engaging daily in activities to build language and literacy skills, your child will be better prepared for school. And, you may prevent serious reading difficulty for him or her. At the very least, you will recognize early that your child may struggle with reading. Early recognition and instruction with appropriate reading methods, starting in kindergarten, gives each child the best chance for becoming a successful reader.

Recommended Books

Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success, published by the National Research Council, Eds. M. Susan Burns, Peg Griffin, and Catherine E. Snow, 1999.

Straight Talk About Reading, by Susan L. Hall and Louisa C. Moats, 1999.