

Learning to Read giving our little ones a good start

Babies and toddlers whose parents or carers regularly talk to them are not only being helped to learn to talk – it also gives them a good start in learning how to read.

Perhaps you are surprised by that, but by talking and listening to young children, we help them to hear how language is put together. Over time they will begin to identify the different sounds they hear and turn them into words. And eventually they will be able to match sounds to letters – knowledge they will find useful when they begin to read.

The National Literacy Trust (www.wordsforlife.org.uk) says that playing with our baby can develop their social and communication skills. It also recognises that babies love music, and using songs and rhymes is a fun way of helping them to learn to speak.

We can easily introduce many different sounds to a young child by giving them opportunities to play with the ordinary materials that are found around most homes. Letting a

baby bang pots and pans or cardboard boxes will produce a completely different sound to scrunching a variety of paper such as cellophane which

crackles, or tissue paper which makes a softer noise. When we spend time encouraging young children to experiment with sound and listen to those sounds, we are building a base from which they can develop listening to the spoken word.

Listening walks are another way to point out sounds that children can hear – birds singing, different vehicle noises, people talking, tills in shops bleeping. There are so many everyday sounds that adults just take for granted, but it pays dividends to take the time to explain these sounds to young children because it encourages auditory discrimination and helps them to listen attentively.

To encourage a child to become a lifelong learner *Directgov* (www.direct.gov.uk) advises that we should:

- sing nursery rhymes and songs to very young children,
- spend a few minutes a day telling stories and reading books together, making it fun by choosing books we all enjoy,
- read words out loud as we walk around the streets and shops, pointing out the signs.

Children, even babies, love books, and providing your child with age-appropriate books is something that every parent can do. There is no reason for this to cost a fortune because we have an excellent library system in the UK. Spending time with our children to help them choose books from the library is as important as reading the books with them.

Most libraries also offer story-telling sessions. This is something that parents and carers really can take advantage of, particularly if we are new to reading to young children, because we can watch and listen to how it's done. Using different voices for the characters in a book, for example, brings the story alive and keeps the child engaged for longer periods.

Why not try making books of your own using photographs of familiar people doing everyday

things – children on the play equipment at the park, for example, or playing with their favourite toys either indoors or in the garden. You could also use photographs of the adults in the children's lives – grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins – whom they may not see every day. Talking to children about what they can see on the photographs is a wonderful way of extending their vocabulary. And writing simple captions to the photograph turns them into a story.

The Department of Children, Schools and Families says that children benefit hugely by exposure to books from an early age. So right from the start, try to provide lots of opportunities for them to engage with books that fire their imagination and interest. Also encourage them to choose and look at books freely, as well as reading stories to them whenever you can. Enjoying and sharing books with babies and toddlers is one of the best ways we can help prepare them for learning to read as it motivates them and gives reading value.

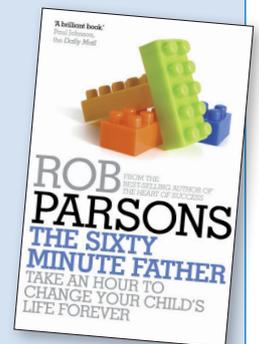
Reading is a lifelong source of pleasure, fun, information and interest and in giving our little ones a good start in learning this important skill we give them a wonderful gift.

Elizabeth Heaton
Headteacher

Take just one hour to
find out how to be a
better dad

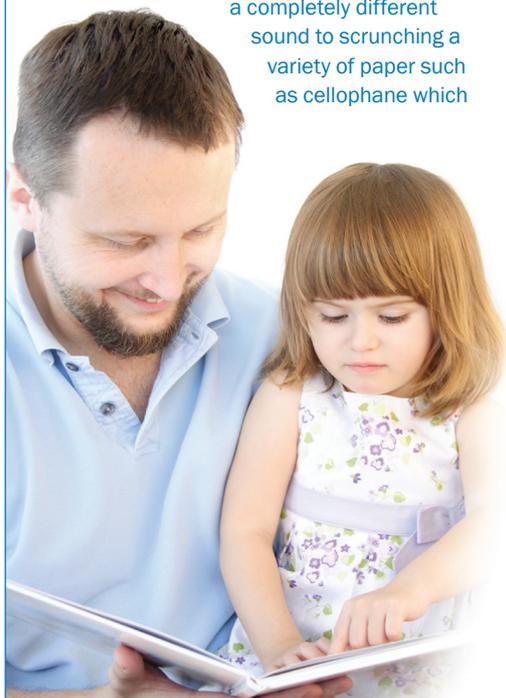
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