

Foster a Love of Reading in your Preschool Child

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Young children need a variety of skills to become successful readers. The 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress indicates that only one-third of our nation's fourth graders have the proficient reading skills necessary to complete their school work successfully. Research shows that children with stronger early literacy skills are better prepared to benefit from the reading instruction they will receive when they enter school. So what can you do as a parent of a preschool child? Simply focus on the joy of learning each day and use the strategies outlined in this article to foster a love of reading and strong pre-literacy skills.

Help your child learn about the world around him by enhancing his vocabulary. Point out and name the objects in the environment around you – make a game of it by playing "I Spy" while waiting for food at the restaurant or shopping at the grocery store. Read a variety of stories to your child, both fiction and non-fiction and speak to your child using the vocabulary that is most comfortable to you. Simply knowing the names of things is an extremely important skill for children learning to read.

Encourage your child's narrative skills daily by asking them open ended questions about their day – help your child retell you the story of your visit to the zoo, what he did at school, or what happens during your bedtime routine. After reading your child's favorite bedtime story, ask her to tell you what happened or encourage her to read it to you by describing the pictures. During meal times or rides in the car, ask your child to make up a story for you or take turns adding to a story, and remember to always use your imagination.

Make sure your child has books available to them at home and school and set aside special time for reading stories to encourage your child's love of reading. Foster his motivation to write by encouraging your child to write his name on artwork and other creations. Children will often write their first letters backwards or from right to left, this is developmentally appropriate. Write your child's name and have her trace it, or practice copying it below your letters. No matter what the end result, praise your child's efforts so that she will feel successful and keep practicing.

You can help to develop your child's print awareness by showing him the links between the spoken word and written word – point to words on a book as you read them or have your child narrate a story while you write it down. Your child can then illustrate the story and make her own favorite bedtime book.

Develop PS pre-literacy skills:

- Introduce new vocabulary
- Encourage your child to tell you stories
- Make books available as often as possible
- Connect print and spoken words/letters
- Use rhyming, poetry and word games to develop sound awareness
- Choose a preschool that supports your efforts

Help your child to learn the letters of the alphabet and what sounds they make. Point out the letters in alphabet books and see how many words you can come up with together for each sound. Make your own alphabet book by going on a magazine letter scavenger hunt; have your child cut out pictures and help him glue them on the corresponding letter page. When playing in the sandbox, draw letters and have your child name them. At home, work together to make name placemats for the dinner table and label where toys go on shelves.

Help your child to develop phonological awareness, or the ability to hear and manipulate smaller sounds in words, by playing fun word games. Make up silly words by changing the first sound in a word: book, look, ook, mook, sook, took, wook. Pause between syllables of a word and have your child guess what you are saying. Read and write poetry with your child and point out rhyming words when you hear them.

When choosing a preschool, look for a print rich environment that has a library center with books always available. Look for shelves labeled with the names of toys, cubbies and mailboxes with children's names on them, and posters and art work that are hung at your child's eye level. Ask for a copy of the weekly curriculum to ensure that story time is incorporated into both large and small group activities. Look for a parent board that will tell you the daily activities so you can ask your child open-ended questions about her day. Look for a nurturing environment where children can feel happy, confident, and proud of what they accomplish.

As a parent of a young child, you worry a lot about whether your child will be ready for school and what you can do to set them on the right path. In the preschool years, the most important thing you can do is to have fun with your child because learning is child's play.

The Children's Workshop is located at 536 MacArthur Boulevard in Bourne, MA and 434 Rte 134 in South Dennis, MA. For more information about programs for infants, toddlers, preschool, pre-K, kindergarten and school age children please call (508) 563-3400 or visit www.childrensworkshop.com.