

Read Aloud: Making it Easy and Fun for You

When parents make reading a part of their own and their children's lives, they not only provide a model of adults who read because they want to and find it a pleasurable activity, they have opportunities for satisfying time spent with children and greatly lessen the likelihood that their children will be poor or disinterested readers.

Most parents have heard that reading to their children is infinitely beneficial. But still it is often difficult to find the time or energy to turn off the television, grab the child and pull your mind from other concerns to enter the imaginary world of children's books.

The following tips may make reading a joyous experience that doesn't seem so difficult to launch regularly.

- Begin reading aloud before or shortly after your child is born.
 - Start with nursery rhymes and songs you know by heart; look at your infant as you say or sing so that you can begin "reading" your child's response.
 - Combine the first rhymes with touch and movement – "This Little Piggie." "Rock-a-Bye, Baby," "Creepie, Creepie, Little Mousie" etc.
 - Reading time doesn't have to be endless, it can vary from day to day. If you become bored or the child is restless, five minutes is better than nothing, but some days you and your child will be so interested you may read for 15 or 30 minutes.
- Reading to a child shouldn't become a chore, but it's more important than any chore you do. When you don't have time, grab five minutes somewhere in the day – perhaps during breakfast and/or bath, after school or after work when you need a reason to sit down, or a few minutes after supper but before dishes are washed. Begin thinking of reading time with children as a way to relieve stress, not another stressful demand. When you're just home from work and tired, take off your shoes, put your feet up, lean back, relax and read aloud – anything from a children's book to the newspaper. (In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee, Scout learns to read by sitting on her father's lap every evening and watching him read the newspaper.)

- Develop the belief that reading is not just critical for survival and success, but that it is a nurturing experience to be anticipated with pleasure.
- Designate a set amount of time – say, 15 minutes – for a bedtime story. The storytime can then include longer stories or several shorts, or the child reading, perhaps at a slower pace. Let children make choices about type of reading to be included. It helps when everyone, parents and children, know the time frame.
- Set aside an hour each evening for quiet work for everyone. Mom and Dad can read books or newspapers, write letters, balance the checkbook or organize a reading round-robin. Children may draw, color, do homework, tell a story to the family or read a story of their choice. (This peaceful scene may seem archaic and impossible in modern life, but it can be done. It takes a strong will, persistence, determination, streamlining a hectic social life and turning things off - the television and even the telephone.)
- Don't stop reading to a child when he/she learns to read! Jim Trelease says that children can understand two to five years above their reading level; and an interest in stories is nurtured by challenging content as well as success in independent reading.
- Don't read in front of the television – on or off.
- Use supper preparation or cleanup as a time when the young reader can practice reading aloud to a parent.
- As a reading variation, play games that require some casual reading such as Monopoly or Pictionary.
- Read the same books your child reads so you can discuss them and stay aware of her/his interests and thoughts. This is especially important with preteens and young adults.