



Turn Off the TV...Tune into Outdoor Adventure

PRE-READING SKILLS IN YOUNG CHILDREN

Creating an appreciation of books and an enjoyment of reading is critical for young children's healthy learning development. Children who enter school with limited exposure to oral language interactions and little prior understanding of concepts related to the sounds of our language, letter knowledge, print awareness, and general verbal skills often start school less prepared than their peers.

Experts speculate that television's negative impact on reading stems from displacement. Time spent watching television robs children of time they might otherwise spend being read to or exploring books. By turning off the TV, we can give children a boost in learning to read and a real leg up in the long run. Surveys have shown that the average American school child watches an average of nearly three hours of TV daily. Over the course of a year that amounts to more hours in front of the TV set than in the classroom. This amount of TV is simply unhealthy for developing bodies and minds and has negative consequences for families.

The most important thing that providers can do is talk and read to children. Starting at birth, it is critical to provide children with many different language and reading experiences that are playful and fun. Include nursery rhymes and rhyming games to expose youth to the sounds of language and story time. It is critical that young children observe adults reading and learn why reading is so important in our lives. Remember, however, to make all of the language and literacy interactions in the childcare center positive and enjoyable experiences. Children who view reading as a positive recreational activity perform better in school. With your help, children can get a head start on the road to reading, even if they cannot yet read themselves. Here are a few techniques to get started:

- First and foremost, read aloud to children no matter how young. Infants love to hear their early childhood professional's voice. Reading to children not only provides a valuable learning experience, it can become a treasured and memorable activity.
- Be a role model. Childcare providers can set a good example by showing that they enjoy and benefit from reading at the center.
- Before reading a particular book to the children, be sure to read it through once to yourself. This way, you can identify areas you might want to concentrate on later when you read it aloud.



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- Be enthusiastic as you read. Show excitement, point to illustrations, and let your tone change with the story. It's fun to give the characters different voices, too. Make sure to give the children time to look at the pictures and ask questions. When words or phrases are repeated in a story, encourage the children to say them.
- After you're finished reading, discuss the book with the children. Find parallels between experiences in the book and those in the children's life to add greater depth and meaning to the story.
- Make books available to the children at all times by placing them on a shelf within easy reach. This invites them to look at books whenever they desire.
- Encourage preschoolers to "write" their own books. Let the children dictate stories or the events of the day to you, and write them down word for word. Allow them to add artwork or pictures cut from magazines. Then, read the book back to the children.
- Encourage parents to make regular visits to the local library, and be sure they elicit the help of the children's librarian. There are a number of library resources available to help you choose books, such as reading lists and lists of award-winning books.

Reading to the children can do more than simply help them excel in school; reading to them can instill a love of books that will last them a lifetime.

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