

**Prepared for:**

**United Independent School District  
Laredo, Texas**



# **Preparing Your Child for Reading Success— Birth to Age Five**

**One of a series of Parent Guides from**



## **Parent Guide**

# **Preparing Your Child for Reading Success—**

Birth to Age Five

The Parent Institute

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*Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D. Executive Editor: Jeff Peters. Writer: Holly Smith. Senior Editor: Betsie Ridnour. Staff Editors: Pat Hodgdon, Rebecca Miyares & Erika Beasley. Editorial Assistant: Pat Carter. Marketing Director: Laura Bono. Business Manager: Sally Bert. Operations & Technical Services Manager: Barbara Peters. Customer Service Manager: Pam Beltz. Customer Service Associates: Peggy Costello, Louise Lawrence, Margie Supervielle & Cynthia Lees. Business Assistant: Donna Ross. Marketing Assistant: Joyce Ghen. Circulation Associates: Marsha Phillips, Catalina Lalande & Diane Perry.*

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Order number: x02579759

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## Introduction

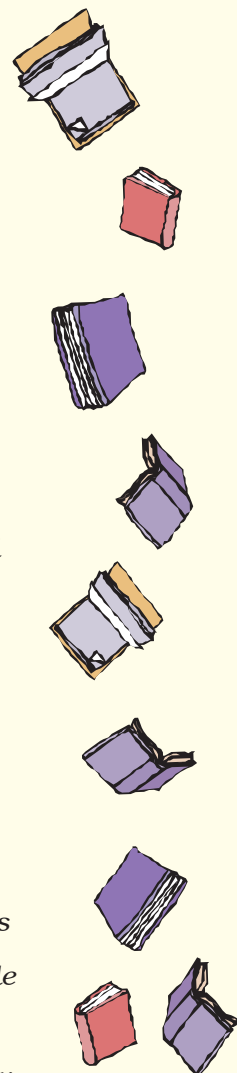
The answer to the question, “What’s the best way to prepare my child for success in school?” can’t be found in a book. The answer is a book. Or rather, lots of them. That’s because reading, like no other skill, forms the foundation of every academic area your youngster will one day encounter. If he\* reads well, chances are he’ll do well.

The good news is that all the tools you’ll ever need to raise a reader are likely lying around your house at this very moment. They’re the books, magazines, newspapers, writing tablets, pencils, crayons, stickers and other wordy materials that keep young bookworms engaged and family rumpus rooms cluttered.

The better news is that, as his loving parent, you’re uniquely qualified to put your child on the road to reading success. Research shows, in fact, that kids who start school having come from word-rich environments—whether they actually know how to read yet or not—do better than children who’ve had little exposure to books or language.

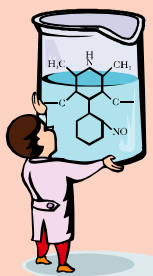
But where can you find ways to create that environment? Right here in this Parent Guide, you’ll find all sorts of information about the who, what, when, where and why of early literacy, along with practical ideas for putting it to use. (And here’s the best news of all: Nurturing your little one’s reading skills isn’t only easy, it’s fun.)

So get going—a wonderful world of words awaits you and your child!



*\*Each child is unique, so this publication alternates using masculine and feminine pronouns.*

## Reading Readiness: The Essential Skills

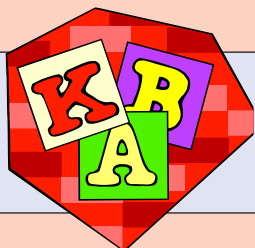


While there's no magic formula for ensuring your youngster's eventual reading success in school, there are several literacy-related milestones she can be expected to achieve by the time she enters kindergarten. According to Reach Out and Read®, a national nonprofit organization devoted to promoting early literacy, kids three years old and up should be able to:

- Handle books properly and turn the pages one at a time.
- Sit still and pay attention to longer stories.



- Retell stories and “read” books to themselves (even if they're really just reciting the words from memory).
- Run their fingers under the words as they're being read to, and understand what text is.



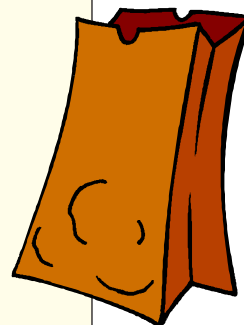
- “Write” (or scribble) their names.
- Recognize a few letters, or at least be moving toward recognition.

## A Word on Phonemic Awareness

When it comes to the best way to teach a child to read, the experts agree: There is no single best way to teach a child to read. But there are several vital components to learning to read, and one of them is phonemic awareness.

“Phonemes” are the smallest units of sound (they’re not letters, but the *sounds* letters make). When strung together, they form words. For example, if you said the word *bag* to a child with good phonemic awareness, he’d be able to identify three distinct sounds: /b/ /a/ and /g/. Put differently, phonemic awareness enables kids to detect the individual parts of a spoken word (it’s a subset of “phonological awareness,” which is the understanding that speech is comprised of smaller parts—words form sentences, syllables form words, etc.).

Are your eyes glazing over? Before you rip up your library card in despair, keep this in mind: You don’t need to “teach” your child phonemic awareness, you simply need to let him *experience* it. That is, help him discover that words are made of sounds, and do it by having fun. Here’s how:



- **Clap your hands.** And your syllables. Sit on the floor with your child and shout out a funny multi-syllable word like “bellybutton.” Help him clap his hands to each syllable (four claps for “bel-ly-but-ton”). It’s okay that he’s too young to know what a syllable is—just encourage him to listen for the breaks in the word.



- **Rhyme, rhyme all the time.** And read tongue-twisters, too! What better way to show him what sounds can do than by playing with them? In addition to indulging in the great rhyming masters like Dr. Seuss, ask him to rhyme with you: “Okay, Jack, what rhymes with *rat*?” Aside from being fun, rhyming is fabulous for showing him that changing a word’s beginning sound creates an entirely new word.

- **Play “Name That Word.”** Think of a simple word, and start saying its sounds out loud. See if he can blend them together and guess the word. For instance, say, “/t/ /r/ /i/...” and see if he can figure out “trip” or “trim.”

## Making the Most of the Library

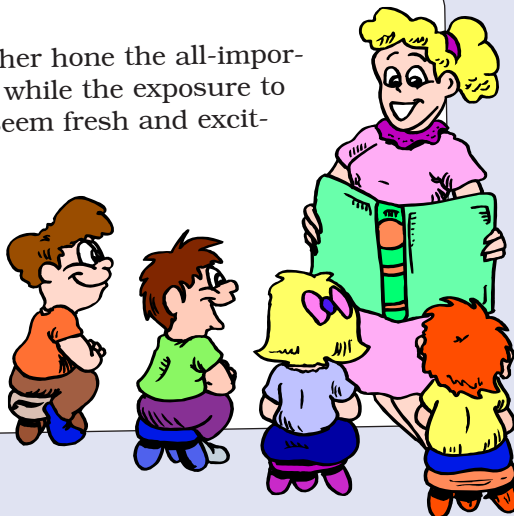
If you only use your library to borrow books, you're missing out. Many public libraries offer a variety of free, kid-oriented programs and activities. The next time you visit your local branch, see which of the following options are available, and consider signing up your little one:



- **Character appearances.** Will Curious George himself be visiting the library next week? How about Arthur, that beloved, bespectacled aardvark? Nothing makes a book come alive for a child like seeing her favorite characters in person.
- **Book signings.** Youngsters aren't likely to get star-struck by meeting the authors of their favorite books, but they might be enchanted to hear those authors read the books aloud.



- **Group story time.** The setting will help her hone the all-important skill of sitting quietly and listening, while the exposure to a new reader will make familiar stories seem fresh and exciting.
- **Reading incentive programs.** By using the promise of stickers, toys or ice cream parties, these programs inspire kids to read regularly. Even small children can participate, since "being read to" usually counts, as well.

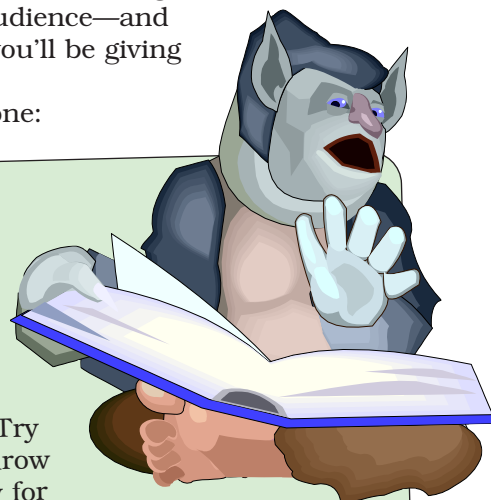


## A More Sublime Story Time

Story time doesn't have to be high-tech, but it shouldn't be humdrum, either. To make the most of the moments you spend reading with your child, try to *engage* him during the process. Make him part of the action—rather than part of the audience—and he'll start to see reading as an exhilarating activity. Better yet, you'll be giving him the tools he needs to grow into a careful, thoughtful reader.

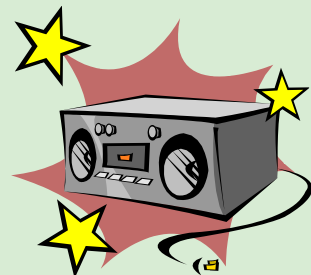
Here are a few easy ways to jazz up story time for your little one:

- **Find a comfy spot.** It could be as elaborate as a fancy overstuffed couch or as simple as a soft floor pillow—just set aside a place where your child can easily flop down and settle in for a story. (Make sure it's well lit, too.)
- **Express yourself.** Are you reading about the Big Bad Wolf? Then how about a growling voice to represent the furry foe? Are you now a timid Little Red Riding Hood? Try some squeaky, high-pitched narration. The more you throw yourself into what you're reading—whether you're ready for Prime Time or not—the more enthusiastic your child will be.



- **Ask questions.** As the story progresses, see if he can guess what might happen next. Is Little Red Riding Hood about to enter the scary forest? What does your child imagine she'll find there? On the flip side, encourage him to ask questions, too. Don't shush him just because you're trying to finish.
- **Let him choose the books.** True, you may not relish the thought of reading *Bears On Wheels* for the fiftieth time in a row, but he will.
- **Celebrate the pictures.** Many children's books are lushly illustrated, so don't neglect to enjoy the artwork as you read. For fun, skip the text altogether and make up your own tale to go along with the illustrations.

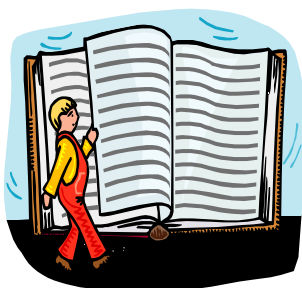
- **Sit back and listen**—to books on tape, that is! Borrow some recorded children's stories from the library, and kick back and enjoy them right along with your little one.
- **Make it special.** Build the experience up in your child's mind by mentioning it during the day: "I can't wait until we get to read together later!" The more you look forward to sharing books, the more he will, too.
- **Be flexible.** There's no rule that says stories must only be shared before bed. So find a part of the day that suits your child. If he needs a breather after romping around all morning, read before lunch. If things are more settled in the late afternoon, turn that into your regular story time.
- **Know when to say when.** Story time should be many things, but grueling isn't one of them. If your child begins to fuss or fidget while you read, it's time to put away the books. Remember, there's no "ideal" amount of reading time; 10 pleasant minutes beats 30 tearful ones any day.



## Bookish Basics

She may still suck her thumb or sleep with a binky, but your child isn't too young to start grasping the nuts and bolts of books. Here are four simple ways to familiarize her with them:

- **Show her how to hold books properly** and how to treat them with care (“We store our books on a shelf so they won't get hurt”).
- **Point out the book's parts** as you read: the cover, the spine, the title, etc. Don't drill her, but do occasionally remind her which parts are which.



- **Teach her to turn the pages.** By the time she's three years old or so, she should be able to flip them at your prompting. By four or five, she'll probably anticipate when it's time to turn.
- **Follow along with your finger as you read.** It's a subtle way to demonstrate that books are read from left to right, top to bottom. She'll also begin to notice that you pause during the spaces between words, and that the first letter of each sentence is bigger than the rest.

## A Superb Shelf

Just like there's no “perfect” child (except yours, of course!), there's no perfect children's book. Instead, there are myriad types of books that can together create an entertaining, educational library for your little one. To stock a super children's shelf, here are some types of books to look for:

- **Pattern books**—stories with repeating words and predictable story lines.
- **Informative books**—nonfiction books that include photographs and information about real things.
- **Traditional books**—fairy tales and other timeless stories (including titles from your own childhood).
- **Concept books**—picture-filled books that introduce notions like shapes, colors or opposites.
- **Counting and ABC books**—the splashier and more engaging versions you can find, the better.



- **Picture books and wordless books**—picture books use illustrations to complement a written story; wordless books encourage kids to create their own stories.
- **Poetry**—what better way to show your child that words can be art?
- **“Just for fun” books**—titles with flaps to lift, pop-up pictures, textured pages, etc. These are especially good for babies and toddlers.

## Nurture a Lifelong Love of Reading

Does your “Books Are Important” message go mute the moment story time ends? Don’t let it. Instead, find ways to show your child that reading matters every day, and that it should be an everyday activity. Here are some ideas for doing just that:

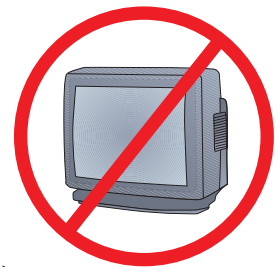
- **Let him see you read for pleasure.** More than anything else you do or say, simply reading for pleasure yourself will send him an unmistakable message about the importance of words. The more he sees you immersed in books, the more he’ll be intrigued by them.
- **Model real-life reading.** If you’re following a recipe for tonight’s dinner, have your child help you. Let him look at pictures in the cookbook while you work. When you make a grocery list, post it on the refrigerator where he can see it. Show him that words are the stuff of life.



### • Maintain a reader-friendly home.

You don’t need to be wealthy to create a word-rich environment. Just keep plenty of books, magazines and other reading materials around, and encourage him to explore. While you’re at it, how about stocking a basket with markers and paper for your little scribbler?

- **Limit TV time.** Books shouldn’t have to compete with television, so limit your child’s tube time (studies show that preschoolers should watch no more than an hour or two of quality programming per day).



Don’t put a set in his bedroom, either.

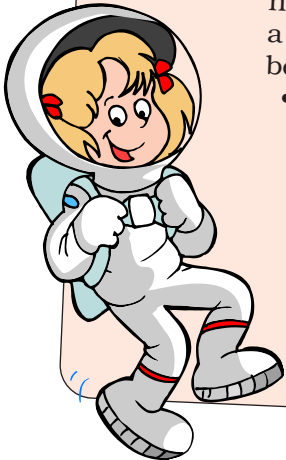
- **Keep books in the car.** Break them out for your child as soon as traffic slows to a crawl. While you’re at it, how about storing a few books on tape in the glove compartment, too?
- **Include him in writing-related tasks.** So what if he’s too young to read or write? Have him “sign” your letter to Grandma anyway. It’ll make him feel important, and you know Grandma will adore it!



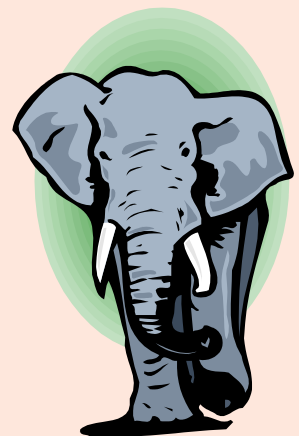
## Beyond Books

There's no question that books are terrific tools for exposing your child to words, but they aren't the *only* tools. In fact, there are countless ways to nurture your little one's language learning without ever cracking open a cover. Here are several:

- **Speak early, speak often.** From the moment she's born, spend time talking to your child. Speak to her about what you're doing, where you're going. Speak as if she understands what you're saying—soon, she will.
- **Recite nursery rhymes.** Filled with silly stanzas and kid-friendly couplets, nursery rhymes are ideal for introducing your child to poetry. If she's drawn to a particular rhyme, incorporate it into your nighttime ritual by reciting it before bed.
- **Sing together.** After all, what are songs but words set to music? For an extra dose of literary fun, teach her to spell her name by setting the letters to a familiar tune (e.g., sing A-M-A-N-D-A to the melody of "Three Blind Mice").
- **Make up stories.** Okay, you're not Maurice Sendak, but Maurice Sendak is not you, either. So don't feel like you need to be a world-famous storyteller in order to craft tales for your child! To really hold her interest, give her a starring role in your homemade sagas: "Kristi was only four years old, but she was already a mighty space explorer ... ."



- **Label household items.** There's no need to slap a sticker on everything in your home (like the dog, for example), but make paper labels for some of the items your child uses frequently. If she sees "refrigerator" and "dresser" often enough, she'll begin to recognize those items' written names.
- **Turn the alphabet song into a lullaby.** Along with your usual roundup of bedtime songs, sing the alphabet to your child once in awhile. She'll end up memorizing her letters without even trying!
- **Keep ABC magnets on the refrigerator** and letter stickers in her art box. Allow your child to play with letters, and she'll learn to love them.
- **Boost her vocabulary by introducing new words.** At the zoo yesterday, was the elephant big, or was it *gargantuan*? Is that cherry lollipop yummy, or is it *luscious*? Sprinkle your conversation with creative words, and she'll begin to pick them up.
- **Indulge your inner thespian.** Use props, puppets or your plain old imagination to act out stories with your child. You'll both have such a blast that you'll barely notice you're way, way, *way* off Broadway!
- **Point out familiar signs.** As you walk around your neighborhood, show your child where street names are posted. When you're heading toward a favorite restaurant for lunch, see if she can recognize the eatery's sign before you pull into the parking lot.
- **Find offbeat ways to practice writing letters.** Instead of relying on the old standbys of pencils and paper (which are fine, by the way), how about teaching your little one to write her ABCs in the wet sand? Or the fresh snow? Or on the foggy mirror after her bath?



## Building Learning's Foundation Can Be Fun!

Every expert you can find will talk about how reading is the foundation for learning, that introducing your child to letters, sounds and words may be the most important thing you can do to ensure children's future success in school. It can also be fun!

The wonderful thing is that preschool children don't see "learning" as work. They are born with a passionate curiosity and love for learning. They want to learn how things work—and *look* and *sound* and *feel* and *smell* and *taste!* The same nonstop enthusiasm that challenges parents of preschoolers every day also makes them eager to learn about reading.

Reading is the perfect activity to absorb children's energy and focus it on something they not only love, but also will help them build skills for learning and enjoyment. The secret is to make reading time with your preschooler fun for *you* as well. Then as you read together you'll be teaching important skills and giving your child a love for reading that can last a lifetime.

**"TV.  
If kids are entertained by two letters, imagine the fun they'll have with twenty-six. Open your child's imagination. Open a book."  
—Anonymous**

## More Help Finding Children's Books

If you're still panicky about navigating the children's section of the library or bookstore on your own—so many titles, such perky fonts—check out the links below. Each offers suggestions for unearthing kid-friendly (and parent-friendly) stories:

- American Library Association, 50 E. Huron, Chicago, IL 60611, 1-800-545-2433, [www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org).
- Reading is Fundamental®, 1825 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20009, 1-877-RIF-READ, [www.rif.org](http://www.rif.org).
- Reading Rockets, WETA/Channel 26, 2775 S. Quincy Street, Arlington, VA 22206, Fax: 703-998-2060, [www.readingrockets.org](http://www.readingrockets.org).
- U.S. Department of Education, America Reads, 400 Maryland Ave. SW, Washington, DC 20202, 1-800-USA-LEARN, [www.ed.gov/inits/americanreads](http://www.ed.gov/inits/americanreads).

## **Other Parent Guides Available From The Parent Institute®**

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*Preparing Your Child for Reading Success—Birth to Age Five*  
*How to Choose the Best Preschool or Day Care for Your Child*

### **School Readiness—Set 2**

*Common Discipline Problems of Preschoolers and How to Deal With Them*  
*37 Experiences Every Child Should Have Before Starting School*  
*Getting Your Child Ready for Kindergarten*

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*Common Discipline Problems of Elementary School Children and How to Solve Them*  
*31 Alternatives to TV and Video Games for Your Elementary School Child*

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*How to Help Children Do Their Best on Tests*  
*Helping Children Get Organized for Homework and Schoolwork*

### **School Success—Set 3**

*Help Your Child Develop Good Learning Styles*  
*How to Instill the Character Traits of Success in Your Child*  
*Seven Proven Ways to Motivate Children to Do Better in School*

### **When There is a Problem—Set 1**

*Help Your Child Deal With Bullies and Bullying*  
*Help Your Child Deal With Peer Pressure*  
*How to Help Your Struggling Student*

### **Other Important Titles**

*Common Discipline Problems of Teenagers and How to Solve Them*  
*What to Do If Your Child Has ADD/ADHD*  
*Common Discipline Problems of Middle School Children and How to Solve Them*  
*Making a Smooth Transition to Middle School*

*For more information about these and other materials for  
parents to encourage learning in their children:*

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