

Parent page

On the road to reading

If you have a very young child, you may not be thinking about the day when she will read her first book to you. And yet, children begin on the road to reading very early in life. Here are some signs that show your child has already begun the great adventure of learning to read.

Baby steps

Even your newborn is gaining skills that will prepare him to learn to read. You have noticed how intently your child stares at light and dark patterns with high contrast. Good vision is necessary for distinguishing dark letters on light paper. By looking around and staring at interesting things, your baby is completing the connections in the vision centers of the brain necessary for good visual discrimination.

Learning language is an important milestone on the road to reading. When your baby looks intently into your eyes, she is learning the art of communication. As she babbles and learns first words, she is experimenting with sounds of letters. By six months of age, the auditory circuits in your child's brain will be tuned to the sounds of her native language to the exclusion of speech sounds from other languages.

Reading to your baby, even when he is very young, is vital. Researchers say that a child must have thousands of experiences with print and listening to words read before they are ready to read themselves. If your older baby grabs his book and tries to put it in his mouth, he is not being disrespectful; he is just getting to know it and showing how interested he is.

Toddling along

When your baby begins walking on her own, she may find it harder to sit still and look at a book with you. Don't be discouraged! Sit on the floor and read while your child plays near you. She will stop by frequently to look at pictures or listen. Your child will also learn how to handle a book during this time, holding books right side

up and turning pages. As your child gets closer to age 2, she will become very interested in looking at the pictures, possibly pointing and naming familiar objects.

Ages 1 and 2 are important times for language development. First your child will begin understanding more of what he hears, then he will begin to say words himself. By two years of age, he will combine words into short sentences. Learning to read has a similar sequence. First your child will listen and understand what you read to him and then will begin to read words himself. This is an important age to say nursery rhymes and sing songs to your child. Hearing rhyming words teaches your child to tell the difference between sounds, a skill he'll need when learning to read.

Racing to school

When your child turns 3, it seems as if school is just around the corner. Many parents worry that their child needs to learn letters and numbers in order to be ready for formal reading instruction. But there are many other things that pave the road to reading during the preschool years. Children become good at pretending, a sign that they can let an object, symbol or idea stand for something else. This is an important intellectual development, as your child will need to understand that a letter represents a particular sound before she can read words.

Vocabulary increases dramatically during the preschool years as children have a wider range of experiences. Children must be able to say words in order to read them. Rhyming continues to help your child learn sounds. And preschoolers like to play with words – the sillier the conversation gets the better! Experimenting with sounds is a fun way to progress toward reading.

Your preschooler will probably be curious about letters and words. She may learn to recognize her name when she sees it



written. Because she recognizes that letters grouped into words mean something, she will ask you what print says when she sees it. Your child may surprise you by “reading” familiar signs or the names of favorite products. She will be very eager to use paper and pencil, and will distinguish between her drawing and her writing, although they may look very similar to you! She may even learn to write some letters that are important to her, such as her name.

On the road

The road to reading is smooth for most children, but can be rocky for some. Unlike learning to talk, children are not born with the instinct to read. Reading must be intentionally learned. As your child's first and most influential teacher, you can provide him with a good start on the road to reading.