

# Creating a Reader.

## Getting Kids Started

We all want our kids to read. We all know that kids who read well do well in school and probably will do well in their later lives.

But how do we start them off? How do we help them to become good readers?

It all starts well before they go to school.

The first great learning experience kids go through is learning how to talk: how to understand what is being said to them and how they can make meaning through language and communicate it to others.

This task is easier for those children who have been immersed in language from the beginning. While in utero they become sensitized to the sound of voices around them: their mother and other future carers and family members. Then, when born, they are spoken to from the very beginning. New parents and carers talk to children as if they understand and, it's not long before they do.

Play with language with a very young child and see how they respond to nursery rhymes and to the games such as counting rhymes, *Round and Round the Garden* or *Incey Wincey Spider*.

And read to them.

Before they can talk, sit a child on your lap and put a book before them. Choose something with bright, strong illustrations and preferably one with a simple rhythmic text. Share it, not necessarily reading it as you would to an older child but by talking about the pictures, telling the story, assuming that the child understands what you are saying.

Gradually, that understanding develops. Simply written picture books are a great source of entertainment for the child but a lot more than entertainment is happening. New language is being added to the child's vocabulary, pleasure in story and story making is being developed, identifying with characters and learning about people and situations through the story is happening and there is an intimate sharing of time with your child. There is no wonder that a story at bedtime, a period of slowing down and listening is a tradition in many households.

A child who has lived their first few years in this way, comes to school knowing about books. They know which way they are held, how to turn the pages, that the lines on the page tell the reader something and that there is probably a story to be told

through to the end of the book. They are already a long way ahead of those children who arrive at school without having had a regular experience with the written word.

From then on, give them more. Use the school and the local library. Find books that tell stories that will engage and excite them. And if they don't want or like a particular story, find one that they do. Read to them whenever you can and don't be deterred if they want to have a book read over and over again.

To create a reader you need develop in children a love of books. Almost all children will learn the rudiments of reading but you want to take them further and further into the world of books and story.

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Further reading: Language and Literacy Development in Early Childhood, Robyn Ewing, Jon Callow Kathleen Rushton, Cambridge University Press, 2016