

Simple Steps to Reading

By Eleanor Joyce

The ability to read well is probably the most critical element of a good education. Perhaps that is why many parents are intimidated by the idea of teaching their child to read. “What if I don’t do it *right*? My kid will be messed up forever!” they cry. And so the hand-wringing, second guessing, and frantic curriculum searching begins!

Just stop, and take a deep breath. Now...think about the millions of children in our nation’s history who learned to read at their parents’ knees, or in a one room schoolhouse, with a teacher not much older than themselves. Their curriculum was often the King James Version of the Holy Bible, or the equally stern *New England Primer*. Nobody told their parents that teaching reading was a skill that could only be accomplished by a highly trained specialist.

As a parent, you are best able to provide the optimal learning environment, incentives and encouragement for your child. Without spending a lot of money, investing huge amounts of time, or sweating buckets of bullets, *you can teach your child to read*, and both you and your child can enjoy the process! The one-on-one interaction of parent and child in the learning experience is priceless, and cannot be duplicated anywhere else. It is pure joy to watch your child’s face light up the first time he sounds out two letters together, and realizes that he has read a word!

Before you break into that first box of flashcards, there are a few foundational principles about reading that should be established. Long before Junior can even hold a book in his hands, there is much you can do to increase the likelihood of his being an excellent reader.

First, make sure that your home is a print-rich environment. Fill your rooms with good quality books and magazines. Incidentally bookshelves on “outside” walls are very good insulation, and muffle sound if you are in an apartment or townhome situation! Building an excellent library need not cost a fortune. Books are readily available at garage sales, library sales, second hand stores, and thrift shops. Great deals can be found online on book closeouts, and re-sales. Remember that your local library is one of the best resources and bargains around! Make it your friend...and visit often.

Develop your own reading habit. Take time every day to sit down and read something. You are your child’s first model, mentor and teacher. An environment where parents and older siblings are frequently seen reading encourages an early interest in books. Be sure to have colorful, sturdy board books in a basket or on a low shelf within your little one’s reach. Even if all he does independently for the first several months is to chew on the corners...at least he will have a book of his own in hand.

Read to your baby! You can get away with reading something like *Better Homes and Gardens* or *The Old Schoolhouse Magazine*. Sitting snuggled in your lap, hearing the

soothing sound of your voice, and seeing colorful pictures is a wonderful experience for a baby. What a beautiful reason for you to sit down and relax too...it's educational! Soon you can move on to simple, colorful books. Slowly turn the pages, and talk about the pictures.

Teaching reading is not a race. It is more like watching a flower unfold. Do not try to rush it, and do not stress about it. Let your child set his own pace. Some children will learn to read much later than others. That's quite okay! Frequently children who learn to read later will make very rapid progress within a few weeks or months.

Dr. Raymond and Dorothy Moore are considered the "grandparents" of modern homeschooling. Both are certified specialists in education, and have spent years researching how children learn. If you find yourself stressing about teaching your child to read I recommend that you look into one or two of their excellent books. *The Successful Homeschool Family Handbook* and *Better Late Than Early* are just two of the titles that are available.

Finally, keep early (and all) lessons short! Nothing will kill the love of reading faster than tedious, frustrating, lengthy sessions spent poring over a book or worksheet.

So, you have a good foundation in place, you've decided you CAN teach your child to read....now what? There are many excellent resources and curricula available, designed to both teach the mechanics of reading, and to foster a love of good literature. A few are listed at the end of this chapter. Talk to parents at co-ops, support groups or online forums. Take the time to ask about what has, or has not, worked for them. Know your child and tailor your approach to their strengths and interests.

For pennies, there are many things you can do at home to start your child on the road to reading. While it won't get you featured in a decorating magazine, try putting labels on everyday household objects. On index cards clearly print words like "bed" "lamp" "window" or "step" and tape them in place.

Shake things up a bit. A child who doesn't have the fine motor skills to use pencil and paper effectively can still learn letter shapes. Try finger paint, or tracing the letter in a pan of rice or cornmeal. Spray shaving foam on the counter and let him "write" in that. Write a letter with glue on construction paper and have him stick cereal, marshmallows or beans to the glue. Use sidewalk chalk.

After your child learns the "alphabet song", teach him letter sounds in a song of your own. Make a poster board phonics chart or book with pictures either hand drawn or cut from magazines, and letters printed in permanent marker. Help the child point to the letter/picture as you sing "ah ah apple, b b ball, c c cat, d d doll, eh eh egg", etc to the tune of "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star".

Teach short vowel sounds first. The child will soon be able to look at “a” and know that it both makes the “ah” sound, and “says its name”. After the short vowel lessons your child will be able to sound out words like up, it, pot, and (mom’s favorite) nap!

There are hundreds of easy, fun, cheap ways to teach and reinforce reading skills at home, which obviously can’t be covered here in one chapter! The point is...there are simple steps to teaching reading. You can take those steps, and you can enjoy them too!

A few resources to take a look at:

- www.starfall.com
- www.enchantedlearning.com
- <http://www.pearsonlearning.com/singspell/index.cfm> (Sing, Spell, Read & Write)
- <http://www.startreading.com/> (Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons by Siegfried Engelmann)
- <http://www.fiveinarow.com/> (Five in a Row)
- <http://www.sonlight.com/> (Sonlight Curriculum)

Biographical Information

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