

Kidsabout Magazine Interview.

At what age should parents start reading to their children?

I've known parents who have read to their babies even before they were born. It's never too early to start reading to your baby.

Babies naturally love the sound of their parents' voices. Reading to your baby is a wonderful way for them to listen to your voice. It can be a very bonding experience.

When babies are very young of course, they will barely be able to focus on looking at a book, but they will still be enthralled by listening to you read. As they grow, they can sit up and focus their eyes. We know visual stimulation is very important for a baby's brain development and books are a wonderful source of imagery and colour. Before you know it, your baby is grabbing at the book, putting it into their mouth, turning the pages and generally learning how a book works. It is a very empowering experience for a young child. Choosing books to encourage this early success can be an incredible gift to give to your baby.

The great thing about young children is that they love to read a book over and over again.

This makes books great value, favourite books will be dragged everywhere, even into bed and the bath. Thank goodness for bath books!

The more positive experiences babies have of reading as they are growing up, the more likely they are to read with ease when they are older and the more likely they are to love books and reading. Reading to your child, early, sets them up for life.

How often should parents start reading to their children?

Read to your child daily if you can. Creating a daily reading routine can be really comforting for your child. It becomes a treasured experience they will remember for their whole life.

Reading before bed or nap time is a practical way to settle a child. Always start with the more stimulating books first and finish with a quiet book, this encourages calm and sleep. Good sleep means everyone in the household benefits. Regular reading at sleep time can shift a child's focus from a busy day to reading fun and then sleep.

Of course reading to your child can happen anywhere and anytime that suits your family; waiting at the doctors, riding on the train, or just having fun with a new book at home.

To create good reading habits, reading regularly is the key.

What advice can you offer parents who don't feel confident reading aloud to their children?

Keep it simple, choose books that appeal to you too. Simple naming books can be fun to start you off. Naming the animals in the picture for example and making the the appropriate noises, is easy and fun. Talk to your baby about the pictures, point to the different things you can see, where they are, what they doing. This will help your baby, as it grows, to focus too. Reading and playing with books is more than just reading the words. You don't have to be a performer, remember your baby loves your voice, the aim is just to have fun and enjoy yourselves.

If parents have had negative experiences or difficulty learning to read themselves, it can understandably be a daunting task to read out loud to your own child. Worrying about doing the wrong thing or not doing a good enough job are often the biggest concerns. This is a common cause of difficulty with reading confidence experienced by many new parents. There are no right or wrong ways of having fun reading to your child. Reading improvement comes with practice and who better to practice on than a child who loves you and wants to be with you.

Today Libraries are very community minded. They love to encourage parents to read to children and understand that not all parents are confident and skilled. Libraries regularly hold children's reading time sessions, where a fabulous librarian will read to your children, play games and have fun. It is a great way to see how someone else will read a particular book out loud. Librarians want you to pinch their ideas and pick their brains. Afterwards, you can then borrow the books, take them home and practice; and it's all free.

Some libraries have even started reading time for babies specifically to demonstrate how to read to them and to give parents helpful tips. It's also a great way to meet other mums and dads. Ring your local council or library to find out what's available in your area or ask your local child and maternal health care nurse.

Helpful reading kits and CD's can also demonstrate how to read various books to your child. The Let's Read Program and the Little Big book Club are two organizations that have great resources available for parents wanting to improve their reading techniques at home. These reading tips are available online, free of charge. They also have extensive recommended reading lists of books that are tried, true and successful with a variety of age levels.

Tell us about your new preschool book series 'SmartyCat'?

SmartyCat is the book series every pre-school parent has been waiting for! All young children love to ask endless questions and sometimes trying to answer them can be really tricky. The SmartyCat book series is especially designed to answer kids' tricky questions in a simple and fun way. In each book SmartyCat asks a question and one of his many friends helps him find the answer. At the end of each book there is a little joke and a fun theme related activity to try with your child. The recommended retail price is \$4.99 and they are published with Hardie Grant Egmont Australia.

What is the The ‘Me Series’ for babies and toddlers?

The ‘Me series’ is a new series of baby board books I am currently working on with Five Mile Press. These books focus fully on babies and toddlers and their interests. They are simple naming books that can be taken anywhere, this series will be created in a variety of bright, fun formats all babies can enjoy. The series will be launched in 2009.

Books for Babies

Look for baby friendly formats small hands can easily use and play with. Books for this age group can be quite quirky and novel. When my daughter was young we loved the Eric Karl books and of course I made the Whose Books series especially for her because she loved bright colours, animals and surprises. Babies love bright colours and clear simple shapes that they can learn to focus on and recognise.

Books for Toddlers

Toddlers are notoriously active so involvement is very important. If a toddler feels they have a job, such as lifting a flap or pressing a button or turning a page, they will focus and listen for longer and enjoy taking charge of their books. Confidence and success at this early age will naturally help develop early pre-reading skills, that will set children up to become confident successful readers later on.

Books for Pre-Schoolers

Many pre-schoolers who experience reading from an early age are able to recognise letters, words and even read simple sentences, but the most important thing to keep in mind is to focus on developing their love of books, then everything else will eventually follow. An enjoyable book routine created when they are young, will give them confidence and learning opportunities throughout their whole life.

Children of this age will develop strong book preferences and favourites, they will wish to read over and over and over again. Sometimes they will hear book read so often they will even memorise it by heart and pretend to read it back to you. All early attempts to read should be encouraged. Just as we encourage our children’s early attempts to speak with encouraging praise, so it should be with their attempts to read. Even when they don’t get things right, it is important to relax and simply give encouragement. Above all continue to have fun.

Pretending to read, mimicking adult readers, guessing, predicting what comes next and even making a new story line for a book, are all a valuable skills in learning to read and in understanding how books work.

Of all the books you have created which book do babies respond to the most?

I would have to say the books in the 'Whose' series have been the most loved and enjoyed by young children. The simple warm characters, bright colours and easy to manage page flaps seem to appeal to children and parents all over the world.

My own daughter loved them and learnt to recognise and read her first words. They gave her the confidence to tackle any book she set her heart on. Watching my own child grow has been the most satisfying thing I have experienced as parent. She will always be at the heart of my books.

I can't wait to start my new 'Me' series of board books for little babies, it is a lot of fun creating new formats for little fingers and curious eyes.