

Encouraging Reading by Laurie Lafortune
Printed in the Red Deer Life newspaper on Feb. 24, 2008

The foundation for reading, understanding, and learning begins at home, long before formal schooling begins. To encourage the development of reading skills, parents should start as early and as frequently as possible with simple communication activities. Set an example; show your child that reading and writing are fun. Have books and magazines around the house, accessible to children. Let your child see you doing literacy activities. Such things as making a grocery list, sending emails, reading the newspaper, writing notes, reading books all send a message of the importance of reading and writing.

For Babies

Read and tell stories to your baby from birth (or sooner!) Your baby will listen to your voice and will hear words, rhythm, and expression and will make the connection between words and meaning. When your baby coos and babbles, he or she is trying to talk to you. Encourage and respond to these sounds.

Talk throughout the day, telling your baby what you are doing, and what is happening next, "I'm making your lunch, and then we'll eat." Or, "I'll wash your face and then we'll get dressed and go for a walk." In the car, in a line-up, or waiting for appointments, are opportunities to provide literacy activities. Sing favorite songs, recite verses and nursery rhymes, and bring along favorite books in your bag.

Books for babies should be durable and easy to clean. A baby's fine motor coordination is just developing and it is difficult for them to turn paper pages, and easy to tear them. Do not worry about teaching a baby to be careful when handling books; simply provide books that can stand up to a baby's use. Thick cardboard pages, or plasticized books with few pages are good choices. Babies will put corners of books in their mouths, and chew on them. After exploring a book in that way, the baby will open the book. Later on, a baby will bring a book for you to read aloud. Point to pictures in books and identify what they are. You don't have to read the exact words of a story, just make up a story based on the pictures.

For toddlers, preschoolers and older

Continue providing books that are durable, but longer, more complex books start to become of interest. Allow your child to choose books at the library and buy books when possible. Some parents avoid the "I wants" when shopping by allowing their child to buy a book, rather than toys or junk food. Garage sales and used bookstores are great for finding low cost books. And your public library is a free and child friendly place to visit often. Have a low, accessible shelf or area for your child's books and encourage care of books. Read daily (or more often) to your child, and have books in his or her room as well as throughout your home.

Let your child choose books for you to read aloud. Children typically have favourites, and may ask for the same book over and over, enjoying the predictability and repetition. You may find that well before learning to read, your child can memorize a favourite book exactly and will repeat the words perfectly, knowing exactly when to turn the page.

As children get older, offer longer books with paper pages. Continue to read together daily. If your child has an interest in a particular topic, find books on that subject to enjoy together. Point out the everyday labels, signs, telephone book, recipes, coupons that are around you. Help your child to recognize common words they see, such as “stop, in, out, exit, sale, open, closed.” Your child will be excited and proud to recognize these words.

Continue to enjoy rhymes, songs, riddles, and word games. Play with blocks and puzzles, and simple board games. Reinforce reading with simple recipes and craft instructions. Participate in family literacy programs in your community offered by your local library. Talk to your child about the books you are reading. Have your child read aloud to you. One technique that many new readers enjoy is having the adult read one page, and the child read the next. Ask your child to retell the plot of books he or she is reading.

Most of all, enjoy reading and books together for a lifetime!

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