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eadng Partners Open the Door to Possibilities

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Reading with children helps them open the door to success in school and later in life. Parents, grandparents, foster parents, child care providers, babysitters, youths, and volunteer reading partners become important role models and gain a strong sense of making a positive difference when they read with children. Many of us already read with children who are family members or who are in our care. Imagine being able to enhance your support of children's reading with a few simple techniques — helping them to develop reading skills, comprehension, and motivation to read.

Program Purpose

Participants will learn:

- techniques for reading with children,
- how literacy develops,
- strategies for being an effective reading partner, and
- techniques to encourage children to write and make art about what they read.

Teaching Outline for Leader

1. Ask all participants to introduce themselves and describe a reading experience.
2. Describe the importance of supporting a child's reading.
3. Discuss with group effective reading partner characteristics and literacy development.
4. Discuss importance of talking with children and selecting books.
5. Describe the difference between reading aloud and shared reading.
6. Have the group practice several of the shared reading activities.
7. Discuss the link between reading, writing, and art activities.
8. Incorporate one of the interactive activities listed at the end.

The video “Connecting Children to Reading” is an excellent teaching support tool available through the Dorsey Resource Center.

Background on Reading Needs

Reading is the foundation for all learning. Research shows that children's chances for success in school are greatly diminished if they cannot read well by the end of third grade. Academic failure increases the risk of drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, and delinquency (Hawkins, 1987).

Research also shows that children with below-average reading skills who have additional sustained opportunities to read with volunteers show significant gains in reading skills. These children often demonstrate higher self-esteem and positive attitudes toward reading, school, and learning.

Four of every 10 American fourth-graders cannot read at the basic level on national reading assessments. To address this problem, the America Reads Challenge asks every American to identify what he or she can do to help all of our children learn to read well and independently.

Programs such as AppalREAD, Energy Express, Let's Read: Partners Promoting Reading in West Virginia, Read Aloud West Virginia, the RFRN Collaborative, and other local AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps*VISTA reading initiatives have accepted the America Reads Challenge. You can be a part of the challenge by learning techniques to support children's literacy development and committing time to read with children regularly.

The Effective Reading Partner

Reading with a child should be a process of partnering with that child — a process in which both partners benefit and learn from each other. In taking the time to be a reading partner, you not only

provide a child with opportunities and support for reading, but you also send a strong message that both reading and the child are important.

The goal of partnering with a child is not to “teach” children to read, but to help children develop their reading skills, expand their ability to make meaning from what they read, and learn to love to read. Keep the following characteristics in mind as you learn to become an effective reading partner. Try to be:

Child Centered — Learn about children’s emotional, social, and cognitive needs by talking with and listening to them.

Sensitive and Respectful — Be respectful of a child’s insecurities about the circumstances of his/her life or about the ability to read.

Caring — Children aren’t interested in how much you know or how much they can learn from you until they know how much you care.

Flexible — Be willing to change course when things aren’t working.

Realistic — Be honest with yourself about what can be accomplished with a child in a session.

Enthusiastic — When you share your love of reading with children, your enthusiasm sets the stage for their motivation to read.

Encouraging — Encourage children by helping them to recognize their successes.

Committed — Remember your commitment is to the child you work with.

Children’s Literacy Development

When reading with a child, you need to be able to understand a child’s literacy behaviors and needs. Literacy begins at birth and emerges during a gradual process of learning to understand and use language. Children first learn to use oral forms of language — listening and speaking — and then begin to explore and make sense of written forms — reading and writing.

Emergent readers may know print carries meaning, how books work, what written language looks like, and that letters are associated with sounds; they may be able to identify and name letters of the alphabet. They need opportunities to look at books, listen to

text being read aloud, talk about text, and practice beginning reading skills. At the next developmental level, conventional readers use letter-sound knowledge, are able to make meaning of text, and need opportunities to practice their reading skills and fluency.

If you are working with more than one child, you will find a wide range of reading interests, abilities, and literacy needs. Some children may be very interested in reading, but struggle with particular skills. They need to exercise those skills. Be sure to identify and encourage what they can do. Some children may have good reading skills, but little interest in reading; they need motivation to practice reading. Provide them with material that interests them, such as magazines, newspapers, recipes, and comic books.

Understanding Reading

Reading is a process of constructing meaning from a written text. Reading involves complex thinking, problem solving, and emotional response. We use many skills to make meaning — sounding out/phonics, recognizing sight words, interpreting an illustration, using knowledge of language and story patterns, and comprehension skills. We rely on our knowledge and personal experiences, also.

Environments rich in reading experience, resources, and role models facilitate literacy development. Children need time to practice reading, opportunities to observe others reading and to read with others, and access to many different kinds of reading and writing materials — library books, magazines, newspapers, homemade books, journals, and letters.

Understanding these factors will help you support children’s reading:

- Children learn to read in social interaction with others.
- Knowing that role models believe that reading is important motivates children to read.
- Opportunities to listen to others read, talk about what they listen to or read, read with others, and read independently support children’s learning to read.
- Exposure to a wide range of literature and other printed materials encourages children’s motivation to read, reading skills, and comprehension.

- Reading and writing develop together.
- Writing and art experiences related to reading support children’s motivation to read, reading skills, and comprehension.

Ultimately, learning to read is the combination of all these factors.

Talking With Children

Children learn a great deal about written language by simply talking with others. Talking, or language experience, expands children’s conversational abilities, vocabulary, and confidence, and is a prerequisite for reading. Talk with children about their lives, everyday activities, and about books — what they liked or disliked, what might happen next and how they would change the story.

Selecting Books

Children who are exposed to good literature are more likely to learn to love literature and include reading as an important part of their lives. The books you choose to read aloud and read with children should be quality literature that appeals to children. A good variety of different types of books is also important.

Many resources can help you choose good literature to read aloud and read with children. These include recommended book lists, teachers, and school and public librarians. Suggested resource books you can find either at your public library or through the state’s interlibrary loan service include:

- Judy Freeman’s *Books Kids Will Sit Still For*
- Betsy Hearne’s *Choosing Books for Children: A Common Sense Guide*
- Eden Ross Lipson’s *The New York Times Parent Guide to the Best Books for Children*
- Kate H. McMullan’s *How to Choose Good Books for Kids*
- Jim Trelease’s *The New Read-Aloud Handbook*

Select books a child is familiar with or are written at a level they are comfortable with so they can practice skills and gain fluency. Also choose books that challenge the child.

Shared Reading: Reading with Children

Traditionally, we read aloud to children, which involves reading a book to a child or a group of

children. Another valuable technique is shared reading. During shared reading, the reading partner actually reads with the child and encourages him or her to read.

Select a book — Choose something on or close to the child’s reading level and something the child will enjoy reading.

Set the stage — Find a quiet and somewhat private place. Sit side by side with the child, making sure the child can clearly see and touch the book.

While reading — Use a shared reading strategy. With emergent readers, use your finger to follow the print when you read and encourage the child to do the same. Offer praise and encouragement.

After reading — Keep a list of the books you read together. Discuss the story, encourage rereading, and do a book-based writing or art activity.

Shared Reading Strategies

These shared reading strategies can be used with both emergent and conventional readers. Different methods may be used depending on the child’s interests and reading abilities.

- Unison reading — Partner and child read the same passage aloud at the same time.
- Echo reading — Partner reads a passage to the child, then the child reads the same passage to the partner.
- Whisper reading — Partner reads into the child’s ear, then the child reads into the partner’s ear.
- Stop and go — Partner reads a passage to the child, stopping at a passage that is something the child can read comfortably or when the child gives a signal that he or she wants to begin reading. The child reads until signaling for the partner to begin reading again.
- Discovery reading — Partner guides the child through a familiar or predictable book, asking the child to fill in sight words and/or repeated phrases.
- Wordless reading — Partner asks questions and makes comments about a picture book to guide the child’s telling of the story.
- Sighting — Partner asks the child to find punctuation, word, and book parts before reading.
- Solo reading — Child reads while the partner encourages problem solving and comprehension.

Supporting Writing

Reading and writing develop together. Children need opportunities to make connections between reading and the written word to support their overall literacy development. It is important to encourage “book-based” writing. Creating their own written words, based on books, helps children make these connections and find meaning in what they read and write.

When children write about what they read they remember more, retain information longer, participate more actively in discussions, make generalizations more readily, see relationships to other print material, are more willing to ask questions, think more critically, and are more aware of their own learning processes.

To encourage children to write, provide real reasons for writing: journals, letters, notes, labels, lists, names, stories, play scripts, and books.

Creating books is a fun way to encourage children to read, write, and make art. Children can make or “publish” books that include their drawings, stories, and poems. Books can be sewn, glued, stapled, folded, or three-dimensional, and they can be big or small, long or short.

Young and emergent writers can be stifled by spelling. To help create the security they need to enjoy writing, avoid talking about “right” or “wrong” spelling. Instead, assure children you are interested in their good ideas. Encourage children to spell words the best way they can. Focus on creating a positive writing experience.

Making Art

Book-based art activities help children connect their reading experiences to another form of expression. Encouraging children to make art that relates to a book enables them to express their experiences with reading, which helps them further explore the meaning of what they read. Meaningful art experiences provide children with freedom of choice, thought, and feeling. To help build a child’s literacy, plan art activities that are connected to reading and writing.

Children’s art can be made using inexpensive materials found around the home, such as egg cartons, paper bags, paper towel tubes, magazines,

cereal boxes, buttons, beads, dried beans, wrapping paper, newspaper, yarn, fabric, socks, etc. Some activities include stuffed paper bag sculptures, puppets, collages, painting, and drawing.

Interactive Teaching Activities

To create a fun, interactive learning experience for participants, try one or more of the following activities:

Practice shared reading strategies.

Provide examples of a variety of books.

Involve participants in creating a book.

Provide materials for an art activity related to a book.

Provide paint for participants to create a painting based on a book.

Involve participants in a book-based writing activity.

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