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## Reading Partners Open the Door to Possibilities

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Reading partners can use simple techniques to help children develop reading skills, comprehension, and motivation to read.

### 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, and they have a greater likelihood of dropping out or engaging in delinquent behavior. Research also has found that children with below-average reading skills who have sustained opportunities to read with volunteers show significant gains in reading skills.

### 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 provide reading opportunities and support and also send a strong message that both reading and the child are important.

The goal of partnering is not to “teach” children to read, but to help them develop their reading skills, expand their ability to make meaning from what they read, and learn to love to read. To become an effective reading partner, remember to be child centered, sensitive, respectful, caring, flexible, realistic, enthusiastic, encouraging, and committed.

### Children's Literacy Development

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 are able to make meaning of text and need opportunities to practice 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. You should 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 and related activities that interest them.

### 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, their everyday activities, and books — what they liked or disliked, what might happen next, and how they would change the story.

### Selecting Books

The books you choose to read aloud and read with children should be quality literature that appeals to children. Recommended book lists, teachers, and school and public librarians can help you choose good literature. Suggested resource books 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*

## 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 technique is shared reading. During shared reading, the reading partner 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 share 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 activity.

## Shared Reading Strategies

These strategies are excellent shared reading methods to use when reading with both emergent and conventional readers. Select methods 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 and Making Art

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 write and read.

To encourage children to write, provide real reasons for writing, including journals, letters, notes, labels, lists, names, stories, play scripts, and books that include their drawings, stories, and poems.

Children's art connects their reading experiences to another form of expression and increases their understanding. 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.

Children's art can be made using inexpensive materials found around the home. Some activities include: stuffed paper bag sculptures, puppets, collages, painting, and drawing.

## 10 Things You Can Do to Connect Children to Reading

1. Talk with children.
2. Read to children.
3. Read with children — shared reading.
4. Help children read on their own.
5. Write for children — model writing.
6. Write with children — shared writing.
7. Help children write on their own.
8. Make art.
9. Help children understand how language is written and how to make meaning from print.
10. Connect with children's mentors and teachers.

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