



# Speaking for Children

What's best for our youngest children is best for everyone!

## Early literacy builds lifelong learning

May celebrates Get Caught Reading month; an important reminder that reading to young children helps build essential skills for school and life. Children are born ready and able to learn. It is never too early to start reading together. Not only is reading fun, research shows young children who spend time reading with their families enter kindergarten better prepared.

First 5 Sonoma County offers the following ideas and links to resources to help parents and caregivers read daily with their children.

- **Read aloud:** Read aloud with your child to help stimulate his or her mind, develop verbal skills and build vocabulary.
- **Ask questions:** Engage your child by asking questions that relate to the story you are reading together. Ask your child to point to certain colors or objects.
- **Decide to read daily:** Studies have shown that children who are read to daily begin to develop both communication and thinking skills at a much younger age. Commit to reading together every day to help your child develop the skills necessary to enter school more prepared.
- **Take a trip to the library:** Visit your local library as a no-cost way to read and enjoy a variety of books. Involve your child by letting him or her choose the books you read together.
- **Offer age-appropriate books:** The types of books you choose should increase in difficulty as your child ages. For babies and toddlers, begin with books that have brightly-colored, simple pictures and feature familiar names and objects. As your child ap-

proaches preschool age, read books with more complex words, repetition and rhyme.

- **Make reading fun:** Help instill a love of reading in your child by making reading fun. Extend your reading beyond the book by writing (and reading) your own story together or acting out scenes from your favorite book.
- **Enjoy reading everywhere:** Show your child that the joy of reading is not limited to books. Read labels and store signs aloud while grocery shopping. Make-up stories during long car rides and share information about your family while looking through picture albums.

## Reach Out and Read

As a national program promoting family literacy, Reach Out and Read provides numerous resources to help build the joy of reading at home. Below are a few of our favorite links:

**What Children Like in Books** <http://www.reachoutandread.org/FileRepository/WhatChildrenLikeinBooks.pdf>

**Reading Tips** <http://www.reachoutandread.org/FileRepository/ReadingTips.pdf>

**Developmental Milestones of Early Literacy** [http://www.reachoutandread.org/FileRepository/RORmilestones\\_English.pdf](http://www.reachoutandread.org/FileRepository/RORmilestones_English.pdf)

**Book Recommendations** [http://www.reachoutandread.org/about\\_list.html](http://www.reachoutandread.org/about_list.html)

## Creating a love of reading

There are many different things parents can do with babies and toddlers to help develop the basic language and communicative skills that will prepare them to learn to read.

### For Babies

**Talk with your baby while feeding, bathing, and diapering:** Language is the cornerstone of reading development, so the opportunities parents have to talk with babies — while feeding, during bath time, and when diapering — are important. When you talk to your baby during the course of the day, you are really giving him a double bonus. You are teaching language and letting your baby know that she is an important person to communicate with.

**Tell nursery rhymes or sing simple songs with your baby:** Listening to rhymes and songs provides infants with the opportunity to predict "what comes next," an important part of literacy development.

**Offer your baby cardboard books:** Picture books created for babies provide the opportunity for infants to begin having independent experiences with reading materials. And, reading books to your baby provides exposure to literature and the pleasure of the physical contact with you. It lays the foundation for a lifetime of reading enjoyment.

### For Toddlers

**Use books with your toddler to ask and answer questions:** Toddlers' rapidly expanding verbal skills (who? what? where? why?) provide many opportunities for parents to use books to help children ask and answer questions.

While reading books to toddlers, parents can ask questions that help them practice the new things they're learning ("what does the cow say?"), learn about cause and effect ("what will happen?"), and develop sorting and organizing skills.

**Comment on things that happen around your toddler throughout the day:** Adults help toddlers process their experience (who? what? where? why?) by commenting on situations around them: "I wonder who lives there?"

"What does that sign tell us we have to do?" "Where is the milk for breakfast?" "Why is this wet?"

**Encourage your toddler to use crayons, markers, and pencils:** Toddlers are developing the fine motor skills necessary to hold and use writing utensils. Because writing is part of the literacy experience, providing toddlers with supervised writing and marking activities is not only important, but also pleasurable, as toddlers explore their "I can do it myself" approach to life.

### For Preschoolers

**Create a "print-rich" environment for your preschooler:** Preschoolers are very aware of the signs and symbols that represent their names, their ages, where they live, the materials that they use, and many other aspects of their daily living experience. Parents can help them become used to reading and writing by pointing out public signs (traffic signs, billboards, restroom and exit signs), asking preschoolers to help make grocery lists, and playing organized games (alphabet Bingo) and spontaneous games ("let's all look for the letter B").

**Use grocery shopping to encourage reading:** While grocery shopping with preschoolers can be challenging, looking for specific items and brands creates opportunities for children to "read" packages and aisle signs, and match coupons to corresponding products.

**Use meal preparation to encourage reading:** "Reading" a recipe, whether written or drawn, helps preschoolers learn the left-to-right orientation that is part of a reading experience. Children can also match the written language of recipes with the real materials involved, again helping them understand the relationship between printed material and the objects that the print represents.

The first years of a child's life provide many wonderful opportunities for parents to cultivate their babies' basic language and communication skills. Through simple, everyday experiences with language and with warm, loving caregivers, very young children will come to learn the joys of communicating, exchanging ideas and thoughts, and of the written word.

*By Sherilyn Goldsmith, M.Ed., University of Minnesota Child Care Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota. Reprinted with permission.*

## About First 5 Sonoma County

First 5 Sonoma County funds children's health insurance and programs that improve childcare quality, help children succeed in school, and help parents provide safe and nurturing environments for their children. For more information on *First 5 Sonoma County* and its programs, please call 565-6626 or visit [www.first5sonomacounty.org](http://www.first5sonomacounty.org)