

## **F: School Years**

### **Helping Children Learn to Read: Pre-Reading Skills**

Most people think that children must learn to talk before learning to read. However, many children who have speech problems can learn to read. On the other hand, some children with good speech skills, do not progress naturally into reading. Many children have problems in making the connection between oral and written language. These are thinking and language skills that must be mastered before learning to read. If your child is having difficulty with speech and language, he or she may need extra help developing these pre-reading skills. Fortunately, there is a lot you can do at home to prepare your child to read.

#### **TALK TO YOUR CHILD**

Talk to your child as much as possible. Give your child every opportunity to learn about the sounds of words and the rhythms of speech. The child with hearing problems can still learn about speech from looking at moving mouths and noticing how different words are shaped by the tongue and lips. The child can also learn to read gestures, posture and body language.

#### **READ TO YOUR CHILD**

Children discover that printed letters and words are important when they see us paying attention to newspapers, magazines, mail, words flashed on TV screens, recipes and signs. When you read stories and share picture books with your child, letters, words, and reading become a part of the child's world too.

#### **LET'S GET READY TO READ**

1. Help your child focus attention on pictures, sights, and sounds.
2. Enjoy books together in a warm, comfortable environment. Sit close together and share your thoughts and feelings about the book you are reading.
3. Use books which ask your child to search for hidden objects, such as the animals in the forest or the birds in the leaves.
4. Encourage pointing to the unique features of objects and comment about what you see, for example, "What a big truck!", "I like big, red trucks." Even a child with low hearing levels can follow your lead.
5. Do problem solving of all kinds together. "Does this part fit with that?" "If I turn the puzzle piece does it go in?" "Can I make the paper go in the envelope if I fold it?"
6. Play memory games, either with words or objects. Say, "I took a trip, and on my trip I took \_\_\_\_\_?" Each person in turn adds one more item for the others to try to

remember. Or, you can ask, "Please bring me all the things we need to set the table."

7. Ask your child to find information from print/graphic material. For example, ask your child to find a doll or a truck in a toy catalogue that the child especially likes.

During language and pre-reading activities, your child learns to attach meaning to sounds, gestures, or sign language. Then the child discovers that symbols, including pictures, can mean things. Finally, the child must connect specific verbal symbols (words) to speech sounds and word meanings. This is a big job and your child may need extra help or practice along the way.

Your child may begin to identify letters, call out the words on road signs (such as "STOP"), or try to make letter shapes on paper. But, don't worry if your child shows no movement toward these activities. Keep doing the above activities. Some children take longer than others.

Spoken language is a flow of sounds represented by groups of letters. Each person has to discover through many experiences that letters represent individual sounds. Your child needs time to learn about how the individual letters c-a-t, for instance, form the word cat. Your child comes to know this from lots of experiences of being read to, talked with, looking at pictures of cats, and seeing the letters c-a-t placed under the picture.

Learning to read is a long slow process, but with your help your child can get started.

(Based on excerpts from: Parent Articles 1, Pre-reading Skills by Judith M. Creighton, Ph.D)