

Breaking Down the Barriers to Reading

Reading Readiness

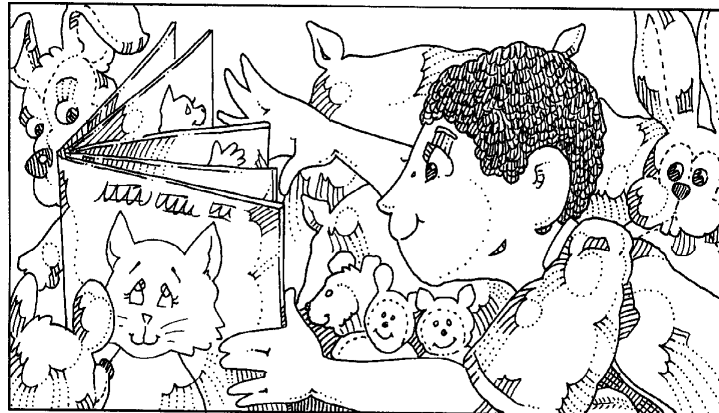
Brought to you by the Editors of Building Readers

Good reading skills are crucial to success in school. Even though your child is only a preschooler and doesn't read yet, you can still get your child prepared to learn to read.

Study after study has shown that children who enter school ready to read and write do far better throughout their education than kids who have little exposure to letters and words.

Unfortunately, even very young children can encounter stumbling blocks on the road to reading readiness. Luckily, though, there are lots of things you can do to help your child blossom into a strong reader some day.

Here are some common barriers to reading, along with strategies for overcoming them:



Lack of Time

With soccer games, playdates and carpools to deal with, not to mention the day-to-day rush of house-keeping, careers and childcare, you may feel there just aren't enough hours in the day to read with your child.

But reading is too important to be skipped, no matter how hectic your schedule. If you think it's impossible to squeeze in quality book time every day, think again. To make your home a bit more bookish, try these tips:

- **Be flexible.** Who said that bedtime has to be book time? If you and your child are too tired to read together at night, flip things around. Read together at the breakfast table, before bathtime or after dinner instead. The important thing is *that* you read, not *when* you do it.

- **Ditch the distractions.** For thirty minutes every night, turn off the TV, the computer and the video games. It's amazing how much extra time you'll discover once the house is unplugged.

- **Schedule it.** If you can't find time to read with your child because of other family activities, make reading one of those activities. Scratch something off of your weekend to-do list (is another trip to the mall really necessary?). Pencil in a chunk of book time.

- **Take advantage** of forced downtime. If part of your child's day involves waiting with you (either in traffic, at the grocery store or the dry cleaners), turn it into a reading session.

Keep books in the car, in your purse or in the diaper bag. Turn those stolen moments into educational ones!

- **Surround your** child with words! Give her plenty of access to books, children's magazines, writing tablets, pencils and crayons. The more she's exposed to reading and writing activities, the more likely she is to explore them.

Reluctance

Children who read for pleasure are almost universally better readers than those who don't. But if your child is reluctant to look at books or to be read to, it doesn't mean he'll end up being a poor reader. He may just need some extra encouragement, more one-on-one time reading with you and, most importantly, some evidence that reading is fun.

How can you prove it to him? *Like this:*

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- **Get your child involved** in selecting books. Give her her own library card and let her use it. If she's put in charge of her reading, she's likely to feel more grown up. And for most kids, feeling like a grown-up is pretty exciting!
- **Set a good example!** If you reach for a book as often as you pick up the remote control, your child will notice. Pretty soon, he'll realize that reading for pleasure is a cool thing to do.
- **Give her access** to interesting books. Have you noticed your child's bookshelf lately? If it's been a long time since you've updated her collection, take a trip to the bookstore or the library's discard bin. With colorful, attractive titles on hand, she may seek out books more often.
- **Reverse roles.** Rather than always reading to your child, ask him to "read" a favorite story to you.
Although he won't actually be reading, he should be able to retell the tale while looking at the pictures.
Not only will he feel good about being able to entertain you, it'll be a terrific opportunity to hone his storytelling skills.
- **Get creative!** Instead of using your regular voice to read, try speaking like an alien, a baby or a dragon.
Not much of a performer? Then make reading exciting in other ways. Stop halfway through a story and ask your child to think of a different ending. Or try substituting her name for one of the character's names.
- **Don't underestimate** her willingness to read and write. Even if she has difficulty understanding stories, reciting the ABCs or forming the letters of the alphabet, she should be encouraged to tackle these activities often.
- **Read together frequently.** Discuss what you're reading. Don't "dumb down" your reading by choosing books that are clearly too simple. Do pause several times during the story to ask if he understands what's going on.
- **Resist the urge** to use baby talk. Young children, whether they have reading difficulties or not, benefit from exposure to high quality language.
- **Speak your native** language at home. Having a strong foundation in their own language helps preschoolers when it comes to reading and writing in English later on.
- **Don't overcorrect.** If your child's phrases are disorganized, don't make a big show of correcting him. Instead, gently repeat his words back in the right order. For instance, if he says, "We have a house yellow," try saying, "You're right, we have a yellow house." This way, you're letting him hear the proper word order without making him feel like he's made a mistake.
- **And finally,** give yourself a break. Your child's reading difficulties will not be solved overnight. It's not your job to deal with them all alone. Do what you can to provide a reading and writing-rich environment. But don't hesitate to ask for help from teachers or a pediatrician when you need it.

Learning Disabilities

It's tough to diagnose learning disabilities in preschoolers since most don't read yet. But there are warning signs that your child may develop reading difficulties later.

For example, if your child began speaking relatively late, uses words out of sequence, has an unusually small vocabulary or often uses words incorrectly, you may want to have him assessed by a learning disabilities specialist, his preschool or a pediatrician (to rule out vision and hearing problems).

But whatever you do, don't despair. Early intervention makes a huge difference when it comes to combating reading difficulties in preschoolers. And there are countless ways you can help your child conquer this barrier to reading. *Here are a few:*

Sources:

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