

THE POWER OF READING

by Lisa Davis

Reading to your child at a young age is one of the most effective tools for expanding his mind and instilling a lifelong love of learning. Reading a good book allows your child to travel to places she has never been, to meet people she has never met, and to develop an understanding of how to deal with a variety of physical and emotional situations.

Reading to your child also helps you develop an emotional connection. Whether you have her cuddle up in your lap, nestle with him while he is winding down for bed, or read to her while waiting for food in a restaurant, you are connecting. Reading to your child from an early age will also help him be successful in school. Reading out loud will help him learn language and become familiar with words. Reading is the foundation for developing an understanding of conceptual information and it sparks imagination!

Your child is never too young to be read to. Frankly, you should begin reading to your child while in the womb. During this time, use reading as a way of familiarizing the baby to your voice. If both parents take turns reading, it is even better. Imagine, before the baby is even born, the act of reading helps you connect and it can help parents reconnect with each other. When your child is born, the adventure begins. During the "easy" phase of infancy when your child is not physically able to explore his/her world, reading to your child helps her feel loved and comforted. Nestled in your arms with a favorite picture book, your baby will, at first, seem unaware of what is going on. But is she?

When my daughters were infants, I would read a series of picture books called the Find The board books by Stephen Cartwright. These books have lively illustrations, but no words. Guided by a series of images that included pictures of children and animals, each book asked children to find the piglet, the duck, the teddy, the puppy, the bird, or the kitten. When my daughters were very small, I would hold the book in front of them and while their heads wobbled about, I would ask, "Ceiley, where's the bird?" Of course, there was no response, so I would point out where the bird was and, in doing so, I would describe the picture and put it into context. For several months, I would pull out the book and ask, "Where's the piglet?" One day, an interesting thing happened. When I asked the magical question, my daughter lifted a chubby finger and pointed to the piglet. Had she understood what I had been saying all along? I will probably never know but one thing is certain, before the age of one, she knew what a piglet was, what the word "find" meant, and she used her magnificent brain to tell her finger to point to the picture of the pig. All because I read a book. Her mind was indeed a blank slate upon which I could impress ideas and concepts.

Reading to your child should become second nature. Anytime, anywhere is an opportunity to read to your child. During the hectic toddler days, books can be lifesavers in public places. If you have to stand in line at a bank, take a book bag along filled with engaging books that your child enjoys. Before they get fussy, take out a book and start reading. Yes, it is very difficult to read to your child while you are holding him and standing up at the same time! Instead, put her in a stroller and bend down. As you read to your child, you are using your time preciously. By bending down, you are coming down to his level. By reading, you are expanding her knowledge and growing neurons. Make your waiting time, his reading time!

Reading while waiting also works well if you have several children with you. Although my daughters are eleven and six years old now, my oldest daughter will still lean over and read along to the book I am reading to my youngest, despite carrying along her own stash of Harry Potter and Manga books. The key is that, by making reading part of your child's everyday experiences, she will come to expect that reading is the norm.

If you are not a reader and do not enjoy reading, you have a great obstacle to overcome. If you do not enjoy reading and/or you were not brought up with reading in the home, it will be doubly difficult for you to get in the habit of reading. Please, don't let this stop you! The exciting thing about being human is that you can change anytime. Start slowly. Find a topic that interests you and start reading. Buy a bookcase and make it a goal to slowly fill it up with children's books, classics, or whatever else suits your fancy.

Read to your child. Engage his imagination. Don't assume that children read at a certain age. There are so many things that you can do to prepare them for the day when they start to decipher letters and words on their own. Lay the foundation early in life and your child will reap wonderful rewards.

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