

A Helpful Guide for Parents who are Concerned about Their Child's Early Reading Skills

By Deanna Stecker

You are the key

As the parent of a preschooler, you play an important role in your child's development. Preschoolers are continually gaining important knowledge and skills that will help them learn to read, write, and succeed in school when they get older. It is important that you observe your child carefully and regularly share your observations with teachers, caregivers and health care providers. Sharing information about skills and about possible concerns will avoid later frustration, if your child shows signs of struggle.

Each Child is Unique

It's likely that your child will learn to read, and over time will become a good reader. But we also know that children take different paths while learning to read. They develop early reading skills at different rates and through different kinds of experiences. For some children, learning to read may seem effortless. Others may struggle with the same kinds of learning that appears to come naturally to other children their age. So when should you be concerned?

Even when children develop differently, there is a typical or usual path of development that should guide your thinking. Many children struggle with learning at some point during their development. Most will catch up with a little bit of extra practice and individual attention. However, you are right to be concerned if your child appears to be having difficulties, especially if he or she seems frustrated.

Earlier is Better

If your child is having difficulties learning, it's never too early to start looking for ways to help him or her experience success. Maybe you think your child should be able to do something that he or she is not yet doing. And maybe you think that, overall, your child's development is right on the mark. In either case, you can take the lead to find out if your child would benefit from some extra or specially targeted help. There are many people who share your goal of helping your child succeed.

You can ask a teacher, principal, school nurse, neighbor, librarian, pediatrician or clergy person to point you in the right direction. Remember, with the right instruction and support, almost all children can become successful readers right from the start.

Here's what you can do next...

Be an Observer

Here are some things to watch out for as you observe your preschooler:

- Very small vocabulary and/or slow vocabulary growth.
- Often unable to find the right word and speaks in very short sentences.
- Even with age-appropriate instruction, struggles with learning the names of letters of the alphabet, matching letters to sounds, and rhyming.
- Difficulty remembering sequences such as numbers, alphabet, days of the week.
- Difficulty pronouncing simple words.
- Difficulty understanding simple directions and following routines.
- Difficulty learning colours and shapes.
- Extremely restless and easily distracted, compared to other children of the same age.
- Fine motor skills slow to develop. Has difficulty holding crayon or pencil, picking up small objects with fingers, copying basic shapes.
- Strong avoidance of certain activities, like storytelling and circle time.

It's best to watch your child in different settings at different times. Use a notebook or pad to write about what your child can and cannot do. Remember, you do not need to write down everything. Jot down notes about your child's strengths and problem areas that concern you.

And don't forget to ask your child some specific questions about things that are easy or hard for him or her to do. Don't stop there...also ask your child for ideas about how to make learning easier and more fun!

Remember, most children exhibit one or more of these worrisome behaviors from time to time. However, if several of these behaviors persist over time, you should seek the advice

of a qualified professional such as a teacher or other early education professional, doctor, nurse or social worker.

Take Action

If your observations and experience cause you to be concerned about your child, what you do next can make all the difference. The more you know about how to get help for your child, the better off your child will be.

- Talk with everyone who knows your child: your child's teachers or early care providers, doctor, nurse or health care professional. Share details about your concerns and ask for feedback and specific recommendations.
- Have your child's hearing and vision checked regularly.
- Talk with other parents who have children of the same age to see whether they have similar concerns about their children.
- Go to a public library to gather information and check out your concerns in books or on the Internet. Ask the librarian to point you in the right direction. See the section below for specific resources that might be helpful.
- Call or go to your local school district office and request information. Keep in mind that going to the school district and asking for information or help does NOT mean that your child is headed for a special education evaluation. School personnel can be very helpful and can often lead you to help and resources that are free of charge and may be just what you are looking for to help your child make progress.

You Can Help

There are so many ways that you can help your child to get ready to read. Even if it's only for a few minutes, look for fun ways to incorporate early literacy activities into your daily routine. Your child will love the one-on-one time with you and will look forward to repeating this special time day after day. Ask your child's teacher, care provider or your local librarian for ideas about activities that will strengthen your child's skills. Watch for and keep a record of changes and growth. Here are some ideas:

- Read to your child every day.
- Point out words and letters that you find in your daily routines, while shopping or traveling through the neighbourhood.
- Sing songs and share nursery rhymes.
- Go to the library and read books together.

Here are some **free resources** that you can find on the *Get Ready to Read!* Web site: www.getreadytoread.org.

- Use the online version of the [Get Ready to Read! screening tool](#) with your child.
- Print out the [Home Literacy Checklist](#) and check it for ideas from time to time.
- Print out the [Classroom Literacy Checklist](#) or [Family Childcare Literacy Checklist](#) and share it with your child's teacher or early care provider.
- Print out *Get Ready to Read!* [activity cards](#) and try some early literacy activities with your child and even with a small group of his or her friends!
- Play the *Get Ready to Read!* [online games](#).
- Go to our [partner page](#) and find links to the Web sites of the *Get Ready to Read!* national partners for more exciting ideas and fun activities.