



# Pre-Reading Skills

Pre-reading skills are the skills children need in order to help them to become a reader. Many of these skills are learnt naturally, during the course of a normal childhood, at home and in the nursery/preschool environment. By talking and reading with your child, you will be doing a great deal to help these essential skills to develop.

- ✓ **Matching:** When we read, part of what we do involves matching. Children learn to match shapes, patterns, letters and, finally, words.
- ✓ **Rhyming:** Research shows that children who can understand about rhyming words have a head start in learning to read and, even more, to spell.
- ✓ **Letter skills:** As well as recognising letter shapes, learning the most common sounds that each letter makes will give children a head start.
- ✓ **Direction:** Print goes from left to right, so children will need to be familiar with where to start each line and which direction to go in.
- ✓ **Motor skills:** Practicing writing letters and words as they learn to read them will help it all to sink in, so a good pencil grip and control is useful.
- ✓ **Concepts of print:** This is all about knowing how to handle books - holding them the right way up, turning the pages in sequence, exploring the pictures, knowing that the words can be read to tell a story.
- ✓ **Language skills:** The more experience children have of language, the more easily they will learn to read. Your child needs to hear and join in conversations (with adults and children), and listen to stories and poetry of all sorts.

Despite the importance of all of these skills, it is an inescapable fact that they will be practiced and improved by learning to read. There is no need to delay reading until your child passes a test in 'reading readiness'. If they start pretending to read, or asking questions, such as "What does that word say?", "What letter is that?", this is a more certain sign that they are ready to read. However, they won't be asking questions like that if they have never heard of words or letters, so reading and sharing books together, talking about the pictures, following the words as you read with your finger will all help.

What you can do to help your child develop pre-reading skills:

## Matching

- Card games
- Dominoes
- Activity books which involve matching shapes, pictures and letters
- Pairing up socks from the laundry
- Shape sorters
- Jigsaw puzzles

## Rhyming

- Sing nursery rhymes
- Miss off the end of rhymes for your child to complete, e.g. "Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great...?"

- When that gets too easy for them, make it harder! "Humpty Dumpty sat in a tree, Humpty Dumpty had a cup of ...?"
- Play rhyming games such as "I Spy with my little eye, something that rhymes with fox" (box).
- Encourage your child to sing along to nursery rhymes, pop songs, whatever they enjoy.

## Letter Skills

- Introduce letters and their sounds gradually
- Start with letters that are important to your child, such as their initial, all those with an interesting shape which makes them easy to recognise.
- Use letter sounds rather than names - 'a for ant', not 'ay for ape'. Letter sounds are much more useful in learning to read than names.
- Generally, stick to lower case letters to start with, except for the first letter of a name.
- Try using magnetic letters

## Direction

- Your child won't need to know 'left' and 'right' in order to read - lots of adults still get mixed up!
- When reading to your child, follow the print with your finger.
- Later, you can ask them where you should start - try reading the words in reverse order, to demonstrate that the story doesn't make sense if you don't start in the right place.
- Many activity books have activities which reinforce left-right direction, such as exercises for the child to draw a line to take the bunny (on the left) to its hutch (on the right).

## Motor Skills

- Encourage your child to be creative, drawing and painting with lots of different tools and materials.
- Playing with small toys, especially construction sets will help to develop fine motor skills.
- Activity books with simple mazes and other exercises involving following a path.
- Using child-friendly scissors is a useful skill which also helps improve fine motor skills.

## Concepts of Print

- Reading books with your child is the best way to help them learn how to handle books.
- Have a special place where books are kept, which is within your child's reach.
- Visit the library.
- Swap books with friends and family.
- Try car boot sales for cheap children's books.
- Talk about the books you read - point out the title, ask them what they think the book will be about, etc.

## Language Skills

- Having conversations with your child about anything and everything is the best way to develop their language skills.
- Reading stories to them will broaden their vocabulary.
- Make sure that your child gets plenty of opportunity to talk to other adults and children