

Talking to your children and reading to them enables them to know words and explore word meanings. To interest your children in books and eventually encourage them to read, have books, magazines, and newspapers in your home as material to read. Feeding children's curiosity about the things they see and see others doing helps them to want to know more. To answer their questions, you turn to reading--on the internet and more readily, in books. There are beautiful, colorful books available to you and your children free in the library about almost anything you want to know. Through your conversations with your children, you will get to know what they are most interested in and feed their interests with books.

Reading is a skill that needs to be learned, beginning with your reading and reading to your children. Recognizing common words like signs (STOP, DANGER, POISON,) names of stores you go to, their favorite foods and cereals helps children to know letters and how letters in words tell us about our favorite things. Names of letters, colors and numbers provide more knowledge for children. Hearing and finding other objects that have the same letter sound they hear at the beginning of words captures their attention. Words that sound like their name or rhyme with their name are fun to hear. Playing such games with your children helps them to hear their language and want to use it like you do.

When children begin to read, their teacher may give them words to memorize, simple words that they must know. These words are called sight words -- to, the, and, that, is, are. Such words need to be recognized automatically in order to advance the children's progress in reading. You as parents must work diligently to help your children memorize these words, using flash cards or word games (www.themeasuredmom.com.)

Other words, children will be able to sound out if they know the sounds of the 21 letters--a, e, i, o, u. Vowels are most commonly called long vowels and short vowels. In Reading in the Elementary School, a classic book about reading by George and Evelyn Spache, they claim that if children know the 10 basic sounds of the vowels and their most common location in words, they can figure out two of every three words they read, a giant step in their reading, spelling, and writing. Children will try to sound out words as they write which is called "inventive spelling," but a smart parent or teacher will gently and patiently write the words correctly, explaining to the children that most people spell the words this way. Spelling words correctly helps us to communicate more effectively and if corrected early will help the children to see and memorize words used most often.

Your children not knowing how to read in later years may lead to the question "Where were the parents when their children needed their help to learn to read?" Don't be those parents!

We need to tell kids flat out: reading is not optional. William Dean Myers