

Reading to your child is fun for BOTH OF YOU!

By Carole Richards

Most of us agree that reading is essential to a leading a successful life. Your personal perspective defines success: career, finances, family, friends, happiness, athletics, talents, or others.

The media and our government continue to publicize our nation's poor literacy rate. So it becomes obvious that reading leads to success. What is a parent or grandparent supposed to do to help their child become a good reader?

First, read to your child often and from a very early age. Reading to a child is a special, magical time. It brings closeness, warmth, love and happiness to both the child and reader. So, when should I begin?

The Infant: Three months of age is not too early to begin reading to an infant. Sit the child facing forward on your lap. Select books with cardboard covers, colorful pictures and even pop-up pages. My favorite is Pat the Bunny, published in 1940. It is colorful, interactive with a peek-a-boo page, mirror and a bunny to pat. Do not expect your baby to fully engage in this activity, but the baby will enjoy the colors, movement, your voice and closeness to you. The baby will begin to consider reading an enjoyable activity and, by starting this early, they will learn to treat a book properly. Neither of my children ever wrote in a book or tore pages intentionally.

The Crawling Infant: By nine or ten months of age, the typical infant is crawling and exploring. Babies are ready to listen to a simple picture book story. They can now begin to select their own stories because they can crawl to get them. Make sure you have books their level to give them some choices. (Remember, you have taught them how to treat books properly.) If you have been reading to your baby since three months of age, they should be ready to make reading a DAILY activity.

The Toddler: By age 18 months to two years, try slightly longer stories and, by age three, try reading a chapter book to your child. Start with a short one like the Stuart Little Series. However, my son listened intently to Charlotte's Web at age three. He cried at the end and wanted me to read it again.

The Kindergartner: By age five or six for sure, your child should enjoy chapter books. The Little House series by Laura Ingalls Wilder, The Ramona and Beezus and Ralph S. Mouse books by Beverly Cleary are designed for this age child and a little older. These stories are tender, real and often very funny.

The First Grader: Your child is entering 1st grade. Do not stop reading now! Many parents think, "Now my child must read to me," and they stop reading. While you want them to read to you, you should continue to read above their level. C.S. Lewis and the Voyages of Narnia were a favorite for my seven year old.

Reading to Your Child beyond First Grade

Just because your child is reading does not mean you should stop reading to your child.

Read Together as a Family. Once I watched a family with teenagers reading aloud the latest Harry Potter book to each other in a local coffee shop. Each family member took a turn reading and you could tell they were really engaged.

Why Read to your Child? Reading develops listening skills, critical thinking skills and vocabulary. The more complex the book, the larger the vocabulary your child will develop.

Reading should become a family ritual, especially at bedtime. It sets the child's mood for warmth, calmness and love. When my children were ill in the middle of the night, I would read to them. They remained calm and returned to sleep more quickly.

My child would never sit still for a story. Let your active child pace, move, even do cartwheels. When it comes to the pictures, show them to the child. Just because your child is in constant motion does not mean they are not listening. Attention Deficit -- Hyperactive children require movement to stimulate the brain so they are able to listen and focus. So let your child move around and continue reading.

My child has a learning disability. Just because they cannot read well, does not mean they cannot learn by listening. You are building important skills as your child's reading skills improve. In addition, if the child with poor reading skills is forced to do all the reading, they begin to dislike the activity. If you keep reading, they will enjoy it more.

I Cannot Afford to Buy A Lot of Books. Ask grandma and grandpa, or an aunt or uncle to buy your child books instead of more toys. Take your child to the library for a fun outing to select books of interest by age three.

So, here's to reading daily and with great delight to your child of any age.

Carole Richards is president of North Coast Tutoring Services, president/director of the Academic Fun & Fitness Camp at Lakeland Community College, author of RICHARDS READ Systematic Language and a frequent guest on radio and TV. She can be reached at caroler@northcoasted.com.

#