



PLAY

How does playing with children help them get ready to read?

Exposing children to many genres and topics can get your child excited about books and build background knowledge for playtime. Parents can also follow their child's interest by bringing home books about topics their child is interested in and likes to act out.

Play time can be an opportunity to show children that print is used in a wide variety of ways. Drivers use maps, chefs use recipes, and shoppers use lists. The more children see writing in their play props, the more they learn that print is something that is all around them.

Children learn through all of their senses, so exploration of shapes and letter forms via puzzles, play dough, sensory tables, and body movements all help children build their letter knowledge. Sorting games and matching activities directly involve shape recognition and prepare children to recognize small differences in letters.

As children play, they often discuss their scenarios, actions, and props. "This stick is the magic wand and I'm going to turn you into a butterfly." This gives them a chance to practice new vocabulary. They also learn new words when an adult introduces new ideas. "What would you like for dessert? Would you like cake or a sundae? A sundae is ice cream in a bowl with chocolate sauce and sprinkles on top."

Singing isn't the only way to build phonological awareness skills; chanting games ("Who Stole the Cookies from the Cookie Jar?"), clapping games ("Miss Mary Mack,"), and rhyming games ("Down By the Bay,") all contribute to this as well, by highlighting the rhythms and sounds of oral language, and involving the whole body.

When children act out stories they know, either as a play or with props or puppets, they practice sequencing events. They are also exploring and investigating story structure. Oral language is the critical component that helps build narrative skills. This includes talking about their play, describing what they are doing, negotiating roles, and discussing props.

