

HOW TO READ WITH A CHILD

Shirley Wilkins, Pocahontas County Extension Agent

Reading is the foundation for all learning. In West Virginia, 4 of every 10 fourth-grade students experience difficulty in reading. It is critical that children have a good start with reading from an early age and an opportunity to practice reading. Children's chances of success diminish if they are unable to read on grade level by the end of the third grade. However, reading is not an issue for schools alone. Parents, grandparents, other relatives, community programs, and volunteers need to focus on reading with children before they enter school and address problems with reading at an early age. Reading with children helps them open the door to success in school and later in life.

Most of us know how to read TO a child, and that's an important step in a child's reading development. One step further is to learn how to read WITH a child. A child who is learning to read needs lots of opportunities to practice reading, and they need someone to read WITH them. This is called "shared reading." In shared reading, the child and the Reading Partner are both participating in the activity. The goal of a Reading Partner is to create a positive environment around reading that motivates children to want to read and gives them opportunities to practice reading.

A Reading Partner can be anyone, but the key is to be effective. An effective Reading Partner is:

- Child-centered – Create an environment and set aside time so that you are not distracted and can fully focus on the child and what the child is experiencing.
- Sensitive and respectful – Notice when a child is uncomfortable with a book and change the book.
- Caring – Children become interested in learning from you when they know how much you care.
- Realistic – Determine how much a child can read by her/himself and how much you will need to read. Be realistic about your expectations.
- Enthusiastic – When you share your love of reading with a child, your enthusiasm sets the stage for his motivation to read.
- Encouraging – Help the child recognize success.
- Committed – Be committed to reading with a child regularly.

When reading with a child there are four stages to consider in the reading process:

- Selecting a book – Choose something on or close to the child's reading level and something the child will enjoy reading.
- Set the stage – Find a quiet and somewhat private place. Sit side by side with the child, making sure the child can clearly see and touch the book.
- Support child's involvement during reading – While reading, establish good eye contact, use expression, answer questions, be patient, and be sure to change books if needed.
- Follow up after reading – Keep a list of the books you read together. Discuss the story, encourage rereading, and do a writing and / or art activity.

To enhance the reading experience, a Reading Partner can use one or more “Shared Reading Strategies.” Different strategies may be used depending on the child’s interests and reading abilities. Remember to choose a book and one or more strategies that are appropriate for the child’s age and skill level.

- Picture Reading – The Reading Partner asks questions about the pictures or the child tells a story based solely on the pictures.
- Sighting – Before reading a page or passage, the Reading Partner asks the child to find punctuation marks, certain words, specific letters, the smallest or largest word, or book parts.
- Discovery Reading - The Reading Partner guides the child through a familiar book asking the child to fill in repeated phrases.
- Echo Reading - The Reading Partner reads a passage and the child reads it back.
- Unison Reading – The Reading Partner and child read the same passage aloud at the same time.
- Whisper Reading – The Reading Partner reads quietly into the child’s ear while the child reads aloud.
- Stop and Go Reading – The Reading Partner and child take turns reading. The child chooses a signal to indicate wanting to read or wanting to stop so the Reading Partner can take a turn.
- Solo Reading – The child reads to the Reading Partner.

Remember these 10 ways to help connect children with reading:

- Talk with children.
- Read to and with children.
- Help children read on their own.
- Write for children – take dictation.
- Help children write on their own.
- Create and display art related to reading.
- Make books.
- Have lots of books available.
- Let children see you reading.
- Most importantly, make reading pleasurable.

Source: Reading Partners 2005 Training Manual, published by the WVU Extension Service, 4-H Youth Development, Youth Literacy Team.