

Reading with Your Preschooler

"Children are made readers on the laps of their parents"

Kathleen Sanders Reif

Learning to read is an exciting adventure for young children, one that begins at infancy and lasts a lifetime. Here are five stages of reading that young children experience:

STAGE ONE EXPLORING

Touching, tasting, and even occasional tearing are favorite activities for infants and toddlers as they first discover books. It is never too early to show books or read to your child. Read to infants and toddlers and provide opportunities for them to explore written material.

Snuggling up in a comfortable lap while listening to a story sets the stage for lifelong love of books and learning. Parents might buy inexpensive cloth books and allow children to play with old magazines.

STAGE TWO REPETITION AND ANTICIPATION

As children grow older they begin to copy their parents or older siblings and "pretend to read." They may ask parents to read a story over and over and over. Although parents may tire of the same book, children enjoy the repetition as they anticipate the chain of events.

Repeatedly hearing the story also helps children develop an understanding of connected events. As children discover that stories have a beginning, middle, and end, they learn to memorize and retell stories with amazing accuracy. During this stage children become particularly interested in details: if

parents skip over a sentence or paragraph in a book, children may protest!

STAGE THREE WORDS AS SYMBOLS FOR IDEAS

During the third stage, children begin to develop a basic understanding that the pictures and words in their book have different purposes. Gradually, they understand that written words are symbols for ideas and thoughts.

STAGE FOUR IDENTIFYING AND MATCHING WORDS

In the fourth stage, children begin to identify and match words. Although they may not really understand the meaning of specific words or sentences, children will often point to individual words as the book is read. Following your finger as you run it along the sentences helps children learn that words are placed in sentences from left to right and in a certain order.

STAGE FIVE FOCUS ON MEANING

In this stage, children begin to focus on the meaning of words. They may stop the story repeatedly and ask, "What does this say?" They begin to recognize simple words from their favorite books in other reading materials or places. The word "STOP" on a corner stop sign can cause great excitement.

By Lesia Oesterreich, Iowa State University Extension, Family Life