



What the Experts Say

Bedtime Story

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WHY IT IS IMPORTANT

Parents often ask how they can help their preschool children become good readers and do well in school. Adults who have not studied child development often believe that homework (e.g., copy sheets, flash cards, skills and drills) help preschoolers learn to read at an earlier age. This, however, is not true.

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

Reading ability develops throughout life, but the most important years for literacy development are birth to 8 years. The one most important activity for building literacy skills is reading aloud to children.¹ Reading aloud should start when children are infants and continue even after they are able to read themselves. Parents should be encouraged to read to their children often. One of the nicest times for parents to read with their child is bedtime. Children with a bedtime routine know that this is quiet time and are more ready to listen and focus. They come to love the special nurturing this activity gives them. Feeling the parent's warmth and positive attention while being read to can lead to a love of reading and books that lasts a lifetime.

When parents read and reread books children enjoy, they are engaging in a critical literacy promoting activity - "reading aloud to child". When children hear a story again and again they are better able to understand relationships of characters and sequence of events. Although age-appropriate reading instruction in the classroom is important for successful literacy development, children need to experience reading at home as well.¹

Bedtime stories build positive parent-child relationships, support children's social-emotional development and are powerful literacy development tools.

Preschoolers can enjoy both fiction and non-fiction books. Quality books on subjects children are drawn to are the best choices. Some parents appreciate help with deciding what books to read to their children. Predictable books allow children to memorize (pretend to read) and at the same time promote important early literacy skills. Predictable books have rhyming, repetition, use of refrains, cumulative text, or one idea or sentence per page.²

A bedtime story may be a good way to get fathers engaged. Fathers can have a positive impact on their children's literacy and school success. Oral language and book reading by dads is associated with children's desire to read and with becoming successful readers.

In addition, higher levels of father involvement in routine activities is associated with fewer behavior problems, better social skills, and higher school achievement.³

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Teachers and schools encourage bedtime story reading by loaning books. Including a backpack with a teddy bear or some other “gift” makes reading more attractive. Teachers provide lists of developmentally appropriate, quality books and information about the local library.

Structure evening routines at home and make reading a bedtime story part of the nightly routine. Parents can learn how to choose quality books for their preschoolers.

Let fathers know that reading a “bedtime story” with their children has positive effects on a child’s reading success. Reading success is a large factor in school success.

Each family can structure bedtime story in a manner that works for them. Bedtime story can include but is not limited to:

- Child choosing one or two books.
- Parent choosing one or two books.
- Child sitting on parent’s lap or cuddled nearby.
- Parent reading part or all of a book.
- Just looking at the pictures and talking about them.
- Following the child’s lead sometimes. For example, younger children may get to the middle of the book and want to go back and look at the beginning again. Older preschoolers may insist on reading every page and even may want to “read” themselves sometimes.
- Parents setting limits on how many books to read or how long the reading lasts.

REFERENCES

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