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AGES & STAGES

Is Your Child Ready to Read?

Is your child interested in learning the names of letters? Does he look through books and magazines on his own? Does he like to “write” with a pencil or pen? Does he listen attentively during story time? If the answer is yes, he may be ready to learn some of the basics of reading. If not, he’s like most preschoolers, and will take another year or two to develop the language skills, visual perception, and memory he needs to begin formal reading.



Although a few four-year-olds sincerely want to learn to read and will begin to recognize certain familiar words, there’s no need to push your child to do so. Even if you succeed in giving him this head start, he may not maintain it once school begins. Most early readers lose their advantage over other children during the second or third grade, when the other students acquire the same basic skills.

The crucial factor that determines whether a student will do well or poorly in school is not how aggressively he was pushed early on, but rather his own enthusiasm for learning. This passion cannot be forced on a child by teaching him to read at age four. To the contrary, many so-called early learning programs interfere with the child’s natural enthusiasm by forcing him to concentrate on tasks for which he’s not yet ready.

What’s the most successful approach to early learning? Let your child set his own pace and have fun at whatever he’s doing. Don’t drill him on letters, numbers, colors, shapes, or words. Instead, encourage his curiosity and tendencies to explore on his own. Read him books that he enjoys, but don’t push him to learn the words. Provide him with educational experiences, but make sure they’re also entertaining.

When your child is ready to learn letters and reading, there are plenty of valuable tools to help him—educational television programs, games, songs, and even some of the latest age-appropriate video games and DVDs. But don’t expect them to do the job alone. You need to be involved, too. If he’s watching an educational TV show, for example, sit

with him and talk about the concepts and information being presented. If he's playing with a computer program, do it with him so you can make sure it's appropriate for his abilities. If the game is too frustrating for him, it may diminish some of his enthusiasm and defeat the whole purpose. Active learning in a warm, supportive environment is the key to success.

Last Updated 11/21/2015

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