

# Why Read 20 Minutes a Day?

Let's face it...parents (and kids) are busy! It is difficult to "fit in" all that needs to be done in a day. We are often faced with having to make choices about what stays and what goes in our schedules. So, why is it so critical to include 20 minutes of reading in your child's daily schedule? There is a wealth of research supporting daily reading with your child especially prior to and during the period when s/he is learning to read. Here are a few of the ways reading with your child for 20 (or more) minutes a day benefits him or her.

## **Reading is "brain food"**

Our brains develop as we "feed" them with experiences. The experience of reading (whether you're the reader or the one being read to) activates and "exercises" many of the areas of the brain. The visual cortex works as your eyes track the words on the page and look at the illustrations. Your memory makes connections between what you already know about the topic of the story and its content. You integrate new information learned through reading further strengthening and growing your network of knowledge. Reading provides one of the most enriching and complex brain activities available in life.

## **Reading improves listening skills**

What parent doesn't want their child to be a good listener? The experience of being read to helps children develop good listening skills by keying them into the components of language. Through reading they learn to recognize phonemes (the sound building blocks of language), learn new words to add to their oral vocabularies and connect written words to their real world applications.

## **Reading builds early literacy skills**

Before a child can read independently she must have phonemic awareness and a basic understanding of phonics. Phonemic awareness or the understanding that words are made up of distinct sounds that affect their meaning is the precursor to reading. Reading aloud to your child is one of the main ways to help him develop phonemic awareness. Beyond this, in order to read, a person must understand that there is a connection between letters and sounds. Without this knowledge letters are just squiggles on a page! When you read with your child she learns that print is a representation of the words you say aloud. Repeated experiences with reading allow this understanding to grow. The single greatest factor in a child's ability to read is early experiences being read aloud to.

## **Reading prepares children for kindergarten**

In this day and age children are expected to come into kindergarten with a strong knowledge base. Today's kindergarteners are expected to enter the classroom on day one with a knowledge of upper and lower case letters of the alphabet, the ability to recognize basic shapes and colors and the ability to count to ten. Reading books tailored towards youngsters with your child helps them develop these important and necessary skills.

## **Practice makes perfect**

Generally, the more time you are exposed to something and the more time you spend practicing it, the better you'll become at performing it. This is absolutely true for reading. Research shows that children who have repeatedly been exposed to books from birth generally exhibit strong reading abilities.

## **Reading improves academic performance**

There is a strong correlation between a child's ability to read and her academic performance. Because so much of our schooling relies on our abilities to read, children must have strong reading skills to succeed and thrive in school.

### **Reading just makes “cents”**

For every year that a person spends reading (either independently or being read aloud to), his/her lifetime earning potential goes up considerably. For a time investment of approximately 87 hours a year (20 minutes a day for 5 days a week), you can increase your child’s ability to support him or herself in the future considerably.

### **Reading improves relationships**

Because we are busy it is difficult to have “quality” one-on-one time with our children without distractions. Building 20 minutes into each day for reading together provides this important bonding time. There is nothing more wonderful than snuggling a young child on your lap while reading a few storybooks aloud. Even if your child is beyond the “snuggling” stage, spending 20 minutes reading independently provides you with quiet, uninterrupted time together engaged in the same activity.

## **Did You Know?**

- If a child reads for 20 minutes every day, they are exposed to about 1.8 million words of text every year.  
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That is 137 new words per minute!
- If families read together for 20 minutes a day, 7 days a week, they get more than 121 hours of bonding time every year!
- Many states use 3rd grade reading scores to predict the number of jail cells they might need in the future. 2 (About 3 out of 5 prisoners in America are illiterate.) 3
- For every year you read with your child, average lifetime earnings increase by \$50,000. You make a \$250,000 gift to your child from birth to age five by reading aloud, just 20 minutes a day! 4
- Children who have not developed some basic literacy skills by the time they enter school are 3 - 4 times more likely to drop out in later years. 5

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1 Anderson, R.C., Wilson, P.T., Fielding, L.G. (1988). “Growth in Reading and How Children Spend Their Time Outside of School,” Reading Research Quarterly, 23(3), pp. 285–303.

2 National Institute for Literacy, 1998. [(Arizona Republic (9-15-2004)].

3 U.S. Department of Education.

4 <http://www.readingfoundation.org/parents.jsp>

5 National Adult Literacy Survey, (1002) NCES, U.S. Department of Education.