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Helping Preschoolers Develop Early Reading Skills

Many people believe that children do not begin to read until they enter school. But research suggests that important reading skills begin as early as birth and are developed throughout the preschool years. Helping children develop emergent literacy skills may seem like an overwhelming task. However, many parents are already helping their children learn to read and may not even know it. Research indicates that 30 minutes of literacy activities a day is crucial to preparing a child to enter school, ready to read and ready to learn.

Parents often understand this to mean 30 minutes of reading, but literacy activities that prepare a child to learn to read involve much more than just reading. Parents and caregivers can easily incorporate 30 minutes of activity throughout the day. Small things add up during the course of a day and ultimately make a big difference in helping a child learn to read. Try some of the following easy and fun activities with your preschooler to help him develop early reading skills:

- Read every day.
 - Make story time a part of your daily routine.
 - Read different kinds of things to him. Try picture books, storybooks, magazines and newspapers – anything that has words!

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Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) program staff at MSU Extension can answer questions or help you learn more about money management, parent, food, nutrition and health issues. MSU Extension educators integrate university and community resources to provide tools that help families succeed. For more information on FCS programs in Michigan, call your county MSU Extension office. Check the government pages of your phone book for contact information.

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- Keep some of his books within reach so he can get one any time he wants.
 - Have fun while you read. Change your voice, read fast and then slow, or make up silly words.
 - Involve him in the story. Ask him to guess what will happen next or tell you the story based on the pictures he sees.
 - Answer his questions about the story while you are reading. Don't make him wait until it's over. He probably won't even remember what he had to say!
- Talk and listen – a lot.
 - Describe what you see and hear. Talk about the sunny day, the noisy birds or the warm bath.
 - Talk to her while you are doing your everyday activities. Explain what you are doing while you are sorting the laundry or making dinner.
 - Teach a new word any time you get the chance. The more words she knows, the better.
 - Ask her a question with no right or wrong answer and listen to what he has to say. Try something like, “Why do birds fly?” and see what she has to say.
 - Teach the ABC's.
 - Point out words and letters everywhere you see them – on signs, in books, in newspapers, on their clothes, on food packages. Name them when you see them.
 - Teach him to recognize his name in print. Start with the first letter of his name.
 - Help him to learn the shapes, names and sounds of each of the letters, but make the learning fun. Try making letters out of play dough, drawing them in a tray of salt or writing them on his back.
 - Teach about books and print.
 - Give her books to touch and hold.
 - Show her the difference between the front and back and top and bottom of the book so she knows how to hold it.
 - Have her draw a picture and then tell you the story. Write down her words as she says them.
 - Point to the words as you read so she learns that reading goes from left to right and top to bottom.

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- Have pencils, crayons, markers and paper out all the time so she can practice drawing and writing.
- Play with sounds.
 - Point out words that rhyme like hat and cat, dog and frog, or tree and she.
 - Say a word and have him think of as many words as he can that rhyme with it. It doesn't even matter if all of them are real words. What is most important is that he can think of rhymes.
 - Play letter games. Pick a letter and see how many words you can think of that start with that sound. Get an old newspaper and circle every 'B' you can find.
 - Talk about the letters you see or the sounds you hear in the beginning and at the end of words. Say things like, "Car starts with 'c'" or "Hat ends with 't.'" Make that letter sound so he begins to connect letters to their sounds.
- Relax and have fun. Remember that easy and fun activities will make a big difference.

For more information on this topic and other food, nutrition, health or money management issues contact the MSU Extension office. MSU Extension Family and Consumer Science educators are located in all 83 Michigan counties to integrate university and community resources to help families succeed.

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