

Reading.....when is the best time? by Lindsay Brown (Speech-Language Therapist)

My mother taught my sister and I to read when we were 2 years old. She received a lot of criticism from her friends and family, but was determined to give us an early start in life. She was not a teacher and had no training in this area. Her knowledge came from a book that she read and for some reason believed that the method would work –and it did!

As I look back now, I am so grateful to my mom for giving me the ‘gift’ of reading, but am also amazed at her willingness to ‘swim upstream’, for the sake of her children.

So much has changed and developed over the years with regards to teaching children to read. I work with children on a daily basis, who experience difficulties with reading. There is no doubt in my mind that reading is the key to academic success and without a solid reading foundation, children are at a disadvantage in many learning areas at school. But the question remains.....”when should we teach our children to read?”

To be honest with you, I don’t have the answer and am not comfortable to give a specific age that is the best time to start teaching reading. I believe this just creates more guilt for mothers (and we have enough of that to carry!) What I will say, however, is that there is more to reading, than just picking up a book and reading the words. Children need to learn that letters of the alphabet represent different sounds in different words, that words are broken up into sounds and so much more. Specific aspects of reading are discussed in detail in my article called “Ready to Read?”

What I believe is that we should start to expose our children to sounds, letters, words and sentences from an early age. When you read a book to your child, stop and show them some words that you have read. Young children love to tell you what sound their name begins with and most of them can recognise the letter. Use this knowledge to show them other words that also start with that letter in books.

We are constantly exposed to familiar written words in the form of brands of food, shop names, fast food restaurants etc. This is a wonderful opportunity to teach your child to recognise letters in words and the sounds they represent.

For example, in the words ‘Pick ‘n Pay” – find both of the /p/ sounds. In the word “Checkers”, the letters ‘c’ and ‘h’ represent the /ch/ sound.

Instead of following a structured programme –rather try to be more aware of letters, sounds and words during the day. Play games with your children, like “I Spy” and “Matching rhymes”

And the best of all..... grab a book, snuggle up together and read a story to your child!