

A photograph of a woman with long brown hair, wearing a red top, sitting on the floor and reading a book to a young child with brown hair, wearing a pink polo shirt. The woman is pointing at the book, and the child is looking at the pages. The background is a softly blurred indoor setting with a patterned pillow.

FIRST TEACHER

A Mom's guide to helping
your little one learn

Presented by the Johnson County Public Library

PageAfterPage.org

You Are Remarkable

You have so many responsibilities when raising your child -- feeding, clothing and protecting 24/7. How you accomplish everything remains one of the great human achievements.

One of your most important and rewarding roles, though, is being your child's first teacher.

That's right. His or her first learning experience doesn't happen at the local pre-school or kindergarten. You are your child's first educator!

Helping your toddler explore his or her great new world and preparing your child for life ahead is just as important as making your little one eat beets and applesauce.

Your baby's brain is built the first three years of life. He or she uses sight, touch, taste, smell and listening to know how to react to and move around the environment.

While it seems like common sense that parents play a critical role, research has proven time and again that Mom and Dad make a huge difference in your child's early development.

A baby responds better when caring parents stimulate his or her brain and provide attention to the baby's learning needs.

By design, your young child wants to explore. When you devote time to nurture that curiosity, your child develops socially, emotionally and intellectually.

According to the Indiana Department of Education: "Parents are, and always will be, their children's first and most important teachers. Scientific evidence supports a clear and compelling connection between the quality of a child's early learning experiences and later success in school and life."

Because of your devotion to learning, your child will be better prepared when you take them to preschool or kindergarten. (You will still cry, but you will feel better knowing your child is ready for what lies ahead!)



"Parents are, and always will be, their children's first and most important teachers..."

So, how do you get your little one ready? What are some ways to help your toddler?

Who better to answer those questions than the Johnson County Public Library? Whether at one of our branches or on our website, your library has lots of information. Our librarians have expertise in early childhood learning and are ready to serve you.

We thought it might be beneficial to provide this guide of helpful hints to use when spending time with your child. All of these tips not only enhance learning, but they are lots of fun.

Enjoy while you read on!

The Johnson County Public Library Children's Staff

Reading: Open Your Child's Mind

"Any book that helps a child to form a habit of reading, to make reading one of his deep and continuing needs, is good for him." - Maya Angelou

Reading together - shared reading - every day is the single most important way to help your child get ready to read.

Reading together increases vocabulary and general knowledge. It helps your young one to learn how print looks and how books work.

Shared reading also helps children develop an interest in reading. A child who enjoys being read to is more likely to want to learn to read.

Here are some helpful hints:

TODDLER (Age 0-2)

- Find an unusual place to read. Five minutes at breakfast, five minutes outside, five minutes at bathtime, and five minutes before goodnight!
- Allow your baby to put books in his or her mouth. This is how they explore and learn about books.
- Before you begin a book, look at the cover and predict what the book is about. Have your child turn the book's pages.
- Use books to help teach new words. Books can teach less common words, words that your child may not hear in everyday conversation.
- Make reading fun.
- As you read together, point to letters and words on the page.
- Make sure you have books and magazines in your home.
- Keep your child's books near toys.
- Let your child see you reading!



- Read signs while you go for a walk.
- When you see it, point out the first letter of your child's name.

PRESCHOOLER (Age 3-5)

- Read print everywhere you go! Print on a cereal box or road sign can show your child that words have meaning outside the context of books.
- Share your favorite books with your child and tell what you like about it. Ask about your child's favorite books.
- Ask questions as you read and listen to what your child says. When you finish the book, ask your child to retell the story.
- Read menus at a restaurant.
- Explain unfamiliar words to build vocabulary. Picture books contain around 27 rare or uncommon words per 1,000.
- At the library, check out books about things your child likes (princesses, trains or dinosaurs – there's something for everyone at the library).
- Ask your librarian for help with favorite books among other children.

Writing: Connect Your Child's Dots

"When I began to write, I found this was the best way to make sense out of my life." -- John Cheever

It's hard to believe that your child begins to develop writing skills as young as age 2. Learning forms and shapes of letters are connected to learning how to read.

Scholastic.com says that beginning writers learn to master the functions and purposes of writing.

For example, watching you preparing a grocery list makes an impression. Your child sees writing as an active process.

"Your child realizes that she can use writing to make requests, to identify objects, and to express her feelings," the website says.

Reading and writing go together. Both represent spoken language and communicate information.

Your child also can learn pre-reading skills through writing activities.

Here are some helpful hints:

TODDLER (Age 0-2)

- Writing begins with scribbles and other marks. Encourage this by providing many opportunities to draw and write.
- Use shaving cream or finger paint to trace and make letters. Focus on letters in your child's name.
- Encourage your child to grasp crayons and provide places for him or her to practice the grip strength needed to write.
- Make magnetic letters available and play with them on a surface such as the refrigerator.
- Talk to your child about his or her drawings and write captions or stories together. This helps make a connection between spoken and printed language.



PRESCHOOLER (Age 3-5)

- Write together!
- Send a card to a friend or family member by writing down what your child would like to say.
- Draw pictures with your child. Scribbling is an important precursor to writing.
- When you are writing your grocery list, ask your child to write one. Although it will look like scribbles to you, your child learns that writing has meaning.
- Have crayons, markers and paper in your home.
- Let your child see you write in the language you know best.
- Help your child write his or her name on drawings.
- Write labels for some items in your home. Read the labels with your child.
- Write or draw on the sidewalk with chalk.
- Write or draw on the sidewalk with water and a large paintbrush.
- Take paper and crayons with you on long trips.

Talking: Build your child's words

"Children are great imitators. So give them something great to imitate." - Anonymous

Do you remember the joy when your baby made his or her first words? Do you remember when you wished your 2-year-old would be quiet for just a few minutes?

Speech is an important part of your child's development. You also can help your child better communicate real needs -- inside of crying or pointing.

You can use "speaking opportunities" to help your child identify objects and foods.

Here are some helpful hints:

TODDLER (Age 0-2)

- Talk to your child even if he or she isn't talking yet. Can't think of anything to say? Narrate your day to your child. He or she will enjoy your voice.
- Give your child plenty of time to talk with you, and listen to what is being said.
- Using toy phones, talk to your child while pretending to use the phone. If you don't have toy phones, make two receivers out of sturdy cardboard.
- Go to a familiar place and look for the people who work there. Talk to your child about what jobs they do and what tools they use.
- Tell stories without a book. Make them up as you go along. Your little one finds Mom's voice calming and soothing. Older infants and toddlers recognize some of the words in your story and develop images!
- Respond to what your child says and extend the conversation. "Yes, we did see a truck like that last week. It's called a bulldozer."
- Repeat what your child says and use new words. "You want a banana? That's a very healthy choice."



PRECHOOLER (Age 3-5)

- Take turns being "Simon" in a game of Simon Says.
- Look at a non-fiction book. Talk about real places and things with your child like backyard bugs or an upcoming vacation.
- When reading with your child, encourage him or her to chime in with details about the story so that reading becomes a conversation.
- Ask your child questions that have more than a yes or no answer.
- Try questions like, "What did you do at the park today?"
- Tell your child stories about what you liked to do as a child.
- Talk together about what you see when you go for a walk.
- Add more words to what your child says. If your child says, "fire truck," you can say, "Yes, that's a red fire truck."
- Go to new places to help your child learn new words.
- Act out one of your child's favorite stories from the library.

Singing: Note Your Child's Talent

"Music makes you feel a feeling. A song makes you feel a thought." - E.Y. Harburg

Songs are a wonderful way to learn about language. Singing also slows down language so children can hear the different sounds that make up words.

Singing will help your child hear the smaller sounds in words, and help him or her sound out words.

A Rice University study said that through singing, children learn that music expresses their feelings and ideas. Singing is one of the first experiences children have as creative and self-expressive beings.

Don't worry if you are not a good singer. Your child will love singing with you!

Here are some helpful hints:

TODDLER (Age 0-2)

- Join your child in a fun pots-and-pans drum session.
- Try clapping or wiggling to the beat of a favorite song. Song rhythms can help your child learn that words are made up of syllables.
- Sing songs while you change a diaper or make dinner. Your child loves the sound of your voice, whether or not you can carry a tune.
- Sing nursery rhymes so your child hears the different sounds in words.
- Clap along to the rhythms in songs so your child hears the syllables in words.
- Sing lullabies to your child before bedtime.
- Make up your own songs to tunes you already know.
- Put your child's name in the songs you sing.
- Need some new song ideas? JCPL has a collection of CDs just for children.



PRESCHOOLER (Age 3-5)

- Try singing and acting out "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes" with your eyes closed.
- Singing songs with rhyming words, even silly nonsense words that rhyme, helps your child hear the smaller parts or sounds of words.
- Sing the alphabet song to learn about letters.
- If you know another language, sing a familiar song in it.
- Play music CDs or the radio at home or in the car.
- Sing a favorite song and let your child guess what word comes next.
- For fun, try singing your child's favorite songs very fast and then try it very slow.
- Bring your child to storytime at the library. Full of singing, dancing, scarves, and bells, preschool storytime lets your child express himself or herself.

Playing: Tap Your Child's Creativity

"It is a happy talent to know how to play." -- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Who doesn't remember as a child sitting in a big box and pretending you were flying a large airplane, or lining up toys along your dresser and making believe you were running a department store?

Your child learns a lot about language through play. Play helps your child think symbolically, so he or she understands that spoken and written words can stand for real objects and experiences.

Give your child plenty of playtime. Some of the best kinds of play are unstructured, when your child uses imagination and creates stories.

Here are some other helpful hints:

Toddler (Age 0-2)

- Put on a little puppet show for your child after dinner. If you don't have a puppet, try dancing around with a dishcloth while you say a rhyme.
- Have your child watch you and others play games. In time, your child will want to imitate and play too!
- Use a puppet or household items to act out a favorite or made up story with your baby or toddler.
- Encourage dramatic play. When children make up stories using puppets or stuffed animals, they develop important narrative skills. This helps children understand that stories and books have a beginning, middle and end.

Preschooler (Age 3-5)

- Play with words and rhymes by playing "I Spy" while you wait at the doctor's office or when driving. Start simple and then ask for rhyming words.
- Use a large empty box as a playhouse to act out a story or play. This helps build vocabulary and storytelling skills.



- Make silly faces in the mirror with your child.
- Give your child bowls, cups and containers to play with in the bathtub.
- Make blocks out of food and cereal boxes. Use them to make a fort.
- Make or buy Playdough for your child to explore.
- Bring toys and books with you on trips.
- Make up games to play with your child that you can play anywhere.
- Enjoy children's programs at the library together.
- Check out books from the library that you and your child can act out together.
- Look for parenting books with fun ideas for play activities to try at home.
- Create a dress-up box with old clothes, jewelry, hats and shoes.
- Make a pretend bus with rows of chairs and a paper plate for a steering wheel.
- Set up a play restaurant with menus, paper plates and cups.

Math, Science: Engage Your Child's Logic

"Math is the only place where truth and beauty mean the same thing." -- Danica McKellar

"All my life through, the new sights of Nature made me rejoice like a child." -- Marie Curie

Will your child become the next great scientist or engineer? What better way to find out than helping him or her learn at an early age the thrill and fulfillment of problem solving.

Even if he or she does not turn out to be the next Einstein or Curie, learning math and science in those early years will benefit your child.

Here are some helpful hints:

Toddler (Age 0-2)

- Count things with your child.
- Let your child play with puzzles and blocks.
- Give your child measuring cups and spoons to play with in the bath tub.
- Match and sort toys by color, size and shape. Count the items in each category. You can begin talking about the concept of amount, such as which categories have more, less or equal amounts.
- Get your child a piggy bank. Count the coins inside together.
- Talk with your child about how things look, feel, smell, sound and taste.

Preschooler (Age 3-5)

- Cook with your child. Let your child count and measure ingredients.
- Your child can help set the table and count out plates and cups.
- Fold napkins into squares, rectangles and triangles.



- Hang a clock with numbers in your home.
- Point out numbers on signs as you walk .
- Count the number of traffic lights between home and your destination.
- Count the items you buy at the store.
- Read books about opposites, shapes, patterns and other concepts, including counting books.
- Talk with your child about how things look, feel, smell, sound and taste.
- Get a house plant and teach your child how to take care of it.
- Let your preschooler play with magnets and flashlights.
- Talk about what sinks and floats in the bathtub.
- Talk about how things change outside during the seasons.
- Talk about what you see and hear as you go for a walk.
- Learn about science at the park, the zoo, a science museum or a botanic garden.

Other Fun Activities

Here are some additional helpful ways you can spend time with your child and help with the early learning process:

WORD TREASURE CHEST

- Decorate a shoebox.
- Write down the words of your child's favorite things on cards.
- Put them in the shoe box.
- Take them out and read them together!

PUPPET PLAY

- Playing with puppets is a great way to get your child to talk.
- You can buy puppets or make one out of a sock.
- Encourage your child to talk with the puppet and make the puppet talk.



FAMILY SONGBOOK

- Write down the words of some of your child's favorite songs in a notebook.
- Let your child decorate each page in the book.
- Add the words to new songs as you learn them.

COMPUTER KEYBOARD TEACHING MOMENT

- Use your computer (or one at the library) with your child.
- Show your child how to use the keyboard to type letters.
- Help your child type his or her name.

NEW WORDS TO FAMILIAR SONGS

- Sing "Twinkle, Twinkle Brilliant Star" or Silent Star, Gigantic Star or Flashing Star.
- Use your voice to help illustrate the new adjective.
- Sing about a Gigantic Star in a gigantic voice.
- Sing about a Silent Star in a whispering voice.

Other Fun Activities

Here are some additional helpful ways you can spend time with your child and help with the early learning process:

TOUCH BOOK

- Cut cardboard into same sized pieces.
- Punch holes, tie the pieces together to make a book.
- Put a picture your child likes on each page (rattle, rings and keys).
- Talk about the things while your child touches them.

SALT TRAY

- Add a shallow layer of salt to a cake pan, shoebox or other small container.
- On a piece of paper, show your child something they can draw. It could be a shape, a letter, or a number. Flash cards work great for this.
- Have your child draw that shape in the salt with their finger. Feeling the texture of the salt as they draw helps him or her remember how to form the shape later.
- As your child gets older, give them a pencil, stylus, or other writing utensil. Have your child practice forming the shape in the salt while holding the utensil with the proper pencil grip.

FAMILY MAILBOX

- Make a family mailbox out of a shoebox.
- Tell everyone in your family to write messages or draw pictures for each other.
- Have your child deliver the mail to each family member.



WINDOW GARDEN

- Soak any kind of dry bean overnight.
- Put the soaked beans in a clear, small, plastic bag with a wet paper towel.
- Tape the bag to a sunny window and make sure the paper towel stays damp.
- You will soon have a bean plant growing from your window!

MAKE UP STORY FROM PICTURES

- Pretend to read a book.
- Have your child tell you a story based on the pictures in a book.
- Or ask your child to “read” a book you have read together many times and tell you the story.

Check Out Our Children's Library

An important goal at Johnson County Public Library is to connect children with educational, informational and recreational resources and opportunities.

Here is a sampling of what your local branch might have:

- Game computers for children age 12 and under. No need for a library card on this computer! Kids hop on for half hour sessions to play, listen to stories and songs, and interact with fun and educational computer games. Computers even have colorful keyboards and headphones just right for kids.
- Puzzles, stuffed animals, puppets, games such as Legos or checkers.
- Colorful bulletin boards, friendly characters, a big hand chair, comfy place to read, and child-like atmosphere.
- Bookmarks, free for the taking.

Our Collection

Board books, picture books, early readers, in-between chapter books, novels, graphic novels, series, non-fiction, biographies, poetry, fairy tales.

- Audio books on cassette tape or CD for picture books through chapter books.
- Parent/Teacher Collection: books on supporting children's education and enhancing parenting skills.
- Early Literacy Kits on various subjects containing manipulatives, games, puzzles, puppets, books, CDs, and many more options for ages 0 to 5.
- Music CDs, CD-Roms, Braille books.
- Reference books and online databases.
- Science fair project books.
- Encyclopedias, dictionaries that can be checked out.



JOHNSON COUNTY
PUBLIC LIBRARY

- Newbery Medal titles, Caldecott Medal titles, Young Hoosier Award nominees.
- Entertaining and educational DVDs and video cassette tapes.

Our Programming

Find out more information about specific programs on our Calendar of Events on our website:

PageAfterPage.org.

Register for programs after finding out dates, times, locations, ages, and descriptions. Programs planned by librarians are diverse.

Except for some special events, programs at the library are FREE!

Resources for First Teacher

[Johnson County \(IN\) Public Library](http://Johnson County (IN) Public Library)

Indiana Department of Education

Early Learning Institute

[Brooklyn \(NY\) Public Library](http://Brooklyn (NY) Public Library)

[Multnomah County \(OR\) Public Library](http://Multnomah County (OR) Public Library)

[Kent County \(MI\) Public Library](http://Kent County (MI) Public Library)

Scholastic.com