

Parent-child Reading is Fun

for Parents of Children Aged 3 to 6



Curriculum Development Institute
Education Bureau

PREFACE

Reading is the foundation for learning. Early childhood is a critical stage in the developmental process. The development of a good reading habit in the early years can enhance language learning and knowledge acquisition. During this important period, parents should seize the opportunity to develop their children's interest and competence in reading so as to help them prepare for life-long learning.

The Education Bureau has always been keen to promote a 'Reading to Learn' culture, and schools have been working hard on it. In this respect, teacher guidance and home-school co-operation are equally important. In fact, the development of a child is a concerted effort. The home is the first learning environment for young children and parents are their first teachers. It is the best place to begin the cultivation of reading habits.

By reading together with their children, parents provide the opportunity for children to enjoy themselves and learn at the same time. Communication is enhanced through fun and sharing of feelings. Family members thus learn and grow together.

In 2001 and 2006, Hong Kong participated in 'The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study' (PIRLS). The 2006 findings showed that 9 to 10-year-old Primary 4 students of Hong Kong ranked second amongst those from 45 participating countries and regions. The PIRLS highlighted three factors which affected students' reading ability, including family reading activities, parental attitude towards reading, and family educational resources. Based on the results of the study, we have prepared this series of booklets to introduce parent-child reading and make suggestions on the related activities.

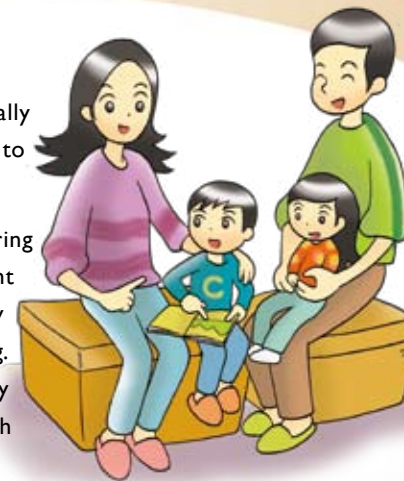
We hope that this series of booklets can help parents nurture their children based on their developmental characteristics and experience reading with them as a fun-filled family activity. With parental guidance and encouragement, young children would be able to develop good reading habits and build a strong foundation for communication skills and learner independence.



INTRODUCTION

From the age of 3 to 6, children gradually develop from 'Learning to Read' to 'Reading to Learn'.

If children manage to learn to read during their pre-school days, and find it a pleasant experience, they will love reading when they grow up. Reading is the foundation for learning. The more children enjoy reading, the better they can acquire knowledge in different areas through reading.



Parents today usually understand the importance of nurturing good reading habits in children. But parents should remember that the purpose is not to turn your children into geniuses, nor should it be used for enforcing rote memorization of vocabulary. Such misconceptions may deprive children of a happy childhood. We only wish to develop children's potential through reading, and help them lay a strong foundation for future learning. Let us make reading one of the happy activities in our children's childhood.

Children love listening to stories and this is the most beloved activity of pre-school children. Through listening to stories and telling them, children can learn different kinds of reading skills and enrich their life experiences through different storylines.

In addition, reading extensively and listening to stories being read aloud, children are being exposed to good written language. This would contribute greatly to their development in writing later.

The pre-school period is an excellent opportunity for children to learn. Parents should take advantage of the time to engage children frequently in reading games and activities. In this way, children would love reading as well as communicating with parents. The setting up of a reading corner at home will provide a desirable reading environment to establish a family reading culture.

Children, who are brought up with parents who show care and affection and provide a rich reading environment, are likely to become proactive, confident and willing to learn.

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1. How do young children benefit from reading?

A good reading habit is of primary importance. Through the reading process, young children can develop different abilities, including those related to affective development.

Development of different abilities

Reading can help develop the following abilities:-

The power of observation

Young children can only recognise a few words. Picture books are perfect for them as the information from pictures are as good as words. The scenes and characters can give a lot of hints about the storylines. When reading with young children, it is necessary to focus them on the details of the pictures to help nurture their power of observation.



The ability to make guesses

When reading picture books, children attempt to find cues from the illustrations. Based on their previous knowledge and experiences, they would make guesses about the development of the plot. For instance, there is a picture which shows a boy blowing a balloon that gets so big that most of the boy's face is covered. Before turning the page, the young reader will guess that the balloon will burst with a big bang in the next picture.

While reading, children will also practise making guesses about the meanings of unfamiliar words and expressions by reading between the lines.

The ability to organise

Children will come to know that there are different characters and storylines when they read more. Parents should encourage children to re-tell the stories so as to develop their ability to organise their thoughts.

The ability to create

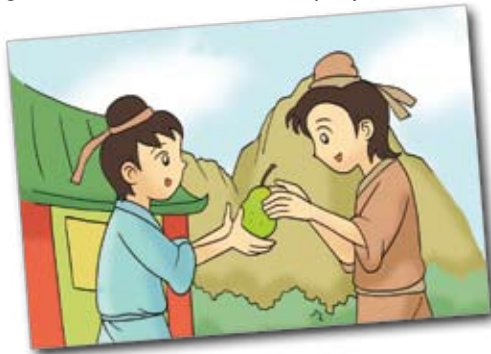
Children are usually born with a rich imagination. They are able to create their own endings or replace characters for the story. These are indications of creativity. Sometimes children may have unusual ideas but do not laugh at them. Do not stifle their creativity. Talk to them and try to understand their thoughts.

Conducting affective education through reading

Through reading, parents can conduct affective education with young children as follows:-

Developing positive values

Parents could conduct affective education through reading. Messages from stories and the behaviour of characters can bring values about kindness, filial piety, frugality, honesty, humility, persistence, politeness and civic duties, etc. Stories, such as 'The Hare and the Turtle', 'The Goose and the Golden Eggs' and 'The Wind and the Sun', introduce values of persistence, politeness, etc. With consistent exposure through reading, these messages will be internalized and help children develop good character and values.



Learning to manage emotions

Children need to learn how to control their emotions. Parents might not find suitable opportunities for such training often. However, when children come across book characters expressing different emotions, parents can use the plot and what happens to the characters in the stories to guide their children in managing their emotions.

Take the following story as an example: Several children were waiting their turn outside a doctor's consultation room. Before entry they were full of fear, but when they came out, their faces were full of smiles. What had happened? It turned out that the doctor was nice and friendly. Doctors are not always frightful people and can even help relieve our pain. Through this story, parents can help children overcome their fear and anxiety about a doctor's consultation.



7. What are the strategies for parent-child reading ?

Selecting story books with pictures

All children love listening to stories. At this age, picture books are the best choice. Stories bring children joy and knowledge. The characters, storylines and language can be quickly absorbed and become part of children's life experiences.



Reading together with children

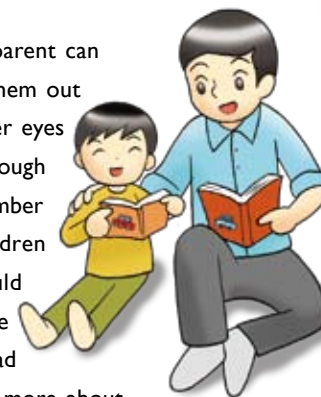
3 to 4-year-olds will sometimes pick up a book and read on their own. This does not mean that the parents' job is done. Even with well illustrated books, parents need to guide children along instead of leaving them to read alone. When a child picks up a book, he/she might just be imitating adults. Without a parent's demonstration, the child's reading development might be affected. Parent-child reading builds mutual trust, enhances communication between parents and children and should be sustained until primary level.



The PIRLS 2006 found that the more family reading activities conducted in the early years, the greater were the children's reading abilities. These activities include reading picture books, story-telling, singing, playing letter games, word games, reading signboards and labels.

Reading aloud to children

This is a crucial step. It is most appropriate if the parent can sit beside the child, pointing at the words and reading them out clearly one by one. The child can then follow with his/her eyes and listen at the same time and thus learns language through the two different sensory activities. Parents should remember to talk about the story from time to time to help children understand the plot. While reading aloud, parents should pause (as indicated by /) as appropriate. For example, 'The little dog / has eaten / Mom's cake' and should not be read as 'The little / dog has / eaten Mom's / cake'. Reading is more about understanding rather than the pronunciation of single words.



Guiding children to guess the development of the story

Children love stories with recurring phrases and repetitive actions. The repetitive nature of stories facilitates the making of guesses at the development of the plot. Reading picture books with 'predictable' plots, such as 'The Three Little Bears' or 'Harvesting Turnips', help children make sense of words.



While reading such books, parents should guide children to look at the details of the pictures and use simple questions to help them find clues and make guesses at the next turn of events in the story. Do not rush to the next page. Pause and let children observe, think, guess and express their ideas. If they get it right, they would be delighted. It is good if parents have the same excitement and praise them sincerely.

Asking children to re-tell stories

Children have very good memories. Not only do they love listening to stories, but they also love telling stories. When children finish reading a story, parents can ask them to re-tell it. In this way, they will have a deeper understanding and their language abilities and power of expression will also be enhanced.

If children leave out certain details, parents can provide cues as appropriate. Once the story is told, parents should show appreciation for both effort and achievement. Even if children cannot re-tell the whole story, they should be allowed to bring in their own ideas and finish the story. This encourages the development of creativity.



Talking about books with children after reading

Children who love asking questions are usually more developed in their thinking abilities. The key to becoming inquiring children lies with parents. If parents are serious in their own questions and replies as well as encouraging about children's answers, the interaction will help develop children who are willing to raise questions.

After reading the story, parents should continue to engage children in the discussion about the storylines and encourage them to express their ideas and feelings. This is an example of a parent-child conversation after reading the story of 'The Hare and the Turtle'.

Mother: Do you like the little hare or the little turtle?

Child: The little hare.

Mother: Why?

Child: The little hare runs fast. You can get a gold medal if you run fast. (The child recalled watching the exciting Olympic Games on TV.)

Mother: But the little hare can't get the gold medal. He loses out to the little turtle.

Child: That's because the little hare falls asleep midway in the race. Mom, why doesn't he finish running before he goes to sleep?

Mother: You are right. If he finishes the race before he sleeps, he would not have lost the race. The little hare is too proud and believes that he is sure to win. You have seen the runners on TV. They all try their best in the race and no one sleeps.

Child: Mom, if the little hare runs with all his might next time, will he get the gold medal?

Mother: I think so. Would you like to draw one gold medal for the little turtle?

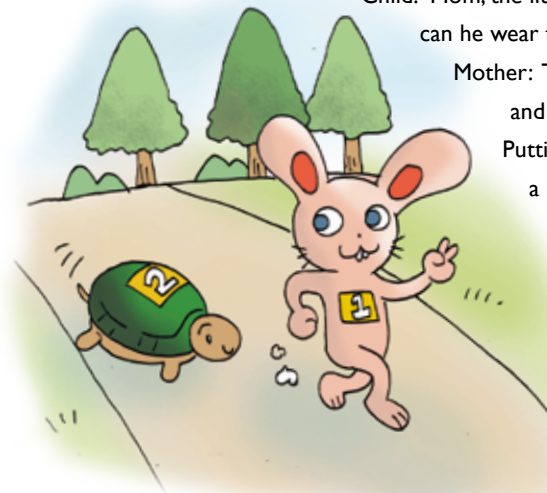
Child: I want to draw two. One for the little turtle, and one for the little hare when he wins next time.

Mother: Wonderful. You can draw a silver medal for the little hare this time.

Child: Mom, the little turtle doesn't have a neck. How can he wear the gold medal?

Mother: That's true. Turtles have short necks and they often hide inside their shells. Putting a gold medal on the turtle can be a problem. What do you suggest?

As adults and children think differently, there should be no 'standard answers' in parent-child discussions. All views should be respected.



Conducting reading games

After reading, the whole family can play reading games together to extend the fun of reading.

Game 1: Post-reading drawing activity

Drawing is a means to express children's creativity. Children can draw to re-tell stories and to express their post-reading feelings.

Adult acceptance is very important for children. Parents should appreciate their children's works by listening to the children's explanation of their drawings with patience and post them visibly at home. The stronger support children get, the more they draw, and the more they will enjoy reading.



Game 2: Family theatre

Children listen to stories, read them, tell them, draw them and even 'act' them out. Parents may turn the living room into a temporary theatre with family members as temporary actors and have fun together.



Parents can start a family performance with a familiar script. Everyone should be assigned a role to play. Parents can prepare some simple props and hint at children to make use of facial expressions, body movements and intonations. Demonstrations can be given if necessary.

If there are a limited number of characters in the chosen story and the children are happy about it, let each child take on more than one role to make the game more interesting.

Game 3: Verbal games

When there is a lull like waiting for transport, riding on a train or bus, or having meals in a restaurant, family members can play verbal games which require no props or advance preparation. For example, word games with each person taking turns to form expressions like 'fish-ball', 'gold-fish', etc. with the word 'fish'. Such games can facilitate understanding of the usage of the word and consolidation of vocabulary acquired.



Game 4: Family choir

Children's songs are starters for children's literature and also companions in their development. As the children grow up, they will be exposed to songs with richer content and language.

Children will start singing after they have listened to songs repeatedly. Parents should encourage this performance in the same way as they do for re-telling stories. It is even better if children can make use of gestures and facial expressions.

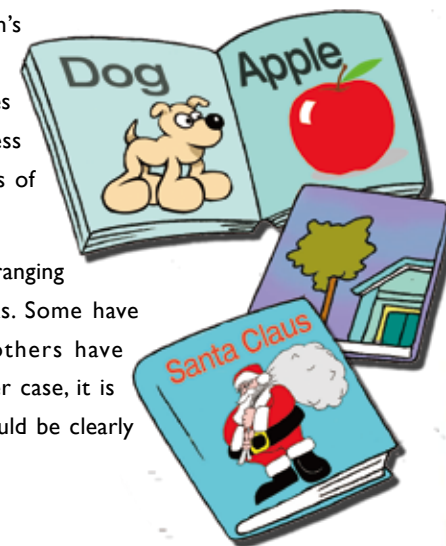
Children can sing either alone or in a family performance. Every one can take turns singing. Fill your home with the happy sounds of singing and reading.



3. How to select books for young children?

Selecting books with good illustrations

When selecting books for young children, parents should choose books with large and neat print to facilitate young children's word recognition. Also, pictures are a very important element of children's books. Pictures and words must match to help children guess the development of the story. Picture books of high artistic value are good choices.



There are two different formats for arranging the pictures and words in children's books. Some have pictures separated from words, while others have words inserted inside pictures. For the latter case, it is important that both words and pictures should be clearly seen.

Selecting books with different themes

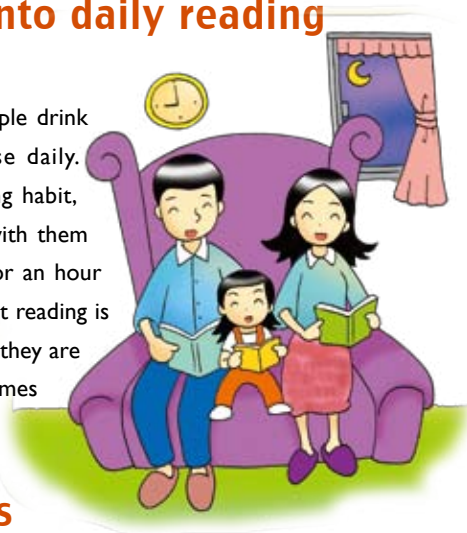
Young children love listening to stories. There are many stories with different themes suitable for children, such as fairy tales, folk tales, myths and stories from daily life. As long as the content is healthy, the language correct, and of appropriate level, they can be used as reading materials.

The language of poetry is often refined, rhythmic and easy to remember. Reading poetry can also be lots of fun. Both classic poems of the Tang dynasty as well as newly created nursery rhymes are ideal reading materials for young children.

4. How to create a family reading environment and culture?

Turning daily routines into daily reading habits

It takes time to form a habit. Some people drink coffee every day while others do exercise daily. Before children manage to develop a reading habit, parents must spend time reading together with them every day, say for half an hour after supper or an hour before bed. Help children develop a sense that reading is a daily necessity, like eating and bathing. Once they are motivated and enjoy themselves, reading becomes a habit.



Paying visits to bookshops and libraries

Take children to bookshops and libraries regularly so as to allow them easy access to all kinds of books. The closer they are in touch with books, the more positive will their feelings be for them. A love of reading will thus be developed.



When taking young children to public libraries for reading or borrowing, parents can use the chance to teach them how to take good care of public properties and value public resources, thus making it a multi-purpose event.

Parent-child Reading is Fun



Buying books for gifts

When parents consider buying presents for children, they might only think of toys. Parents should also consider giving suitable books as gifts. What is more, they can take children to bookshops and guide them to pick their favourite books.

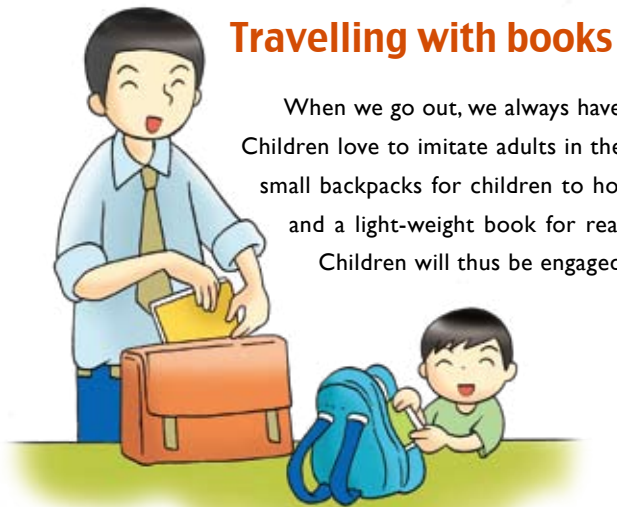
Showing children how to read

Parents' words and actions have a profound influence on children. Those who take reading as a hobby will naturally serve as role models for children in motivating their interest in reading.



The PIRLS 2006 found that there was a positive correlation between parents' reading attitudes and their children's reading abilities. The more time parents spent on reading at home, the better was the reading performance of these children.

Parent-child Reading is Fun



Travelling with books

When we go out, we always have a handbag for necessities. Children love to imitate adults in their actions. Parents can get small backpacks for children to hold their small toys, snacks, and a light-weight book for reading during idle moments. Children will thus be engaged usefully.

Setting aside a reading time for children

Many parents want to plan their children's time with different recreational activities, such as swimming, painting and dancing lessons. Make sure not to get children totally exhausted. Give them enough time and space for rest. Let them have a break to relax and read leisurely and so develop good reading habits.



Furnishing a comfortable reading corner

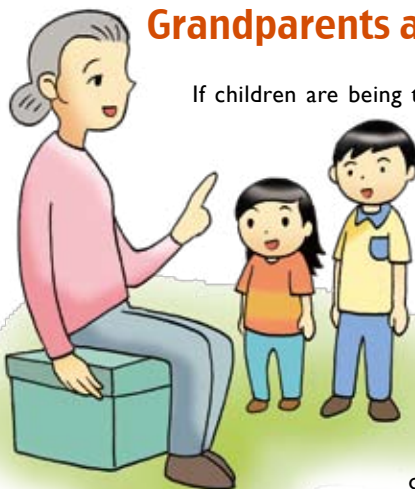
Reading brings fun and pleasure if done in a comfortable environment. Parents can set up a reading corner at home by placing children's books in a fixed location. It should be well-lit and quiet. Parents should also show children the correct posture and the good habit of putting books back in their proper place after reading.

Though parent-child reading is important, children will also require more independent reading as they grow. Allow them to read in a quiet place without disturbance.



5. Tips for parents

Grandparents are invaluable assets



If children are being taken care of by their grandparents, they will spend most of their time with them. Parents should invite grandparents to tell or read stories to young children. The elderly could tell them stories of their times and share their life experiences. These are things children love listening to as there is an old Chinese saying, 'An elder at home is like a treasure in the house'. In this way, family traditions and culture will be passed on from one generation to another.

Exposing children to the written language

There is a difference between the 'spoken' and 'written' language. Through reading, children are exposed to the written language. Parents' reading aloud facilitates children in grasping the form and sound of words as presented in the written language pattern. This will enhance development in reading and writing, and lay a strong foundation for language learning.



Reading in everyday life



There are plenty of reading opportunities in everyday life. Parents can make use of materials around them to encourage children to read. For example, parents can take children shopping and get them to read the shopping list, identify the right shelves, examine the food labels and study the packaging of the shopping items. On another occasion when the family has purchased a new electrical appliance, parents can read the

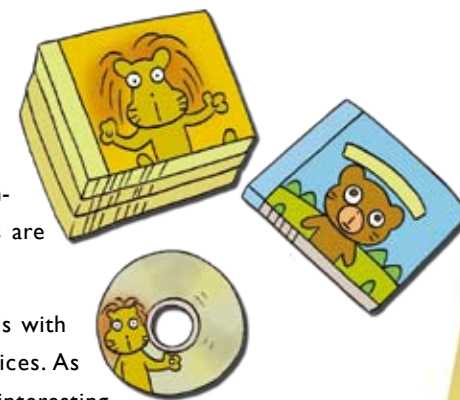
users' manual together with their children. Or when going on a trip,

they can read the tourists' brochures.

Making good use of multi-media materials

To learn a language, children need to have plenty of opportunities for listening. Audio-visual multi-media materials are indeed appropriate for such purpose.

VCDs, DVDs and Internet materials with pictures and sounds are suitable choices. As children love listening to stories, the interesting content together with good audio-visual quality can be considered good listening resources. After viewing the materials, parent-child reading can follow. Children should also be facilitated to view multi-media materials on their own at leisure so that they can gradually form the habit of independent learning.



Appendix: Websites for parents

Award-Winning Chinese and English Books for Children and Young Adults (Book Lists), Education Bureau
<https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/4-key-tasks/reading-to-learn/reading-and-learning-resources/award-books/index.html>



English Campus, Hong Kong Reading City
<https://www.hkedcity.net/english/en/>

Reading to Learn, Education Bureau
<https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/4-key-tasks/reading-to-learn/index.html>

Recommended Reading, Hong Kong Public Libraries
<https://www.hkpl.gov.hk/en/kids/recommended/reading.html>

Comments and enquiries

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The full text of this booklet is available at:
<http://www.edb.gov.hk/pere>