



LISA BURMAN

What you could say when you're asked...

When are you going to teach my child to read?

- We already are! Learning to read starts when children are born because you can't read without understanding language. Oral language gets the brain ready to read print. You can't fast-track this or children will have problems with comprehension and fluency when they read.
- We already are! And so are you! Every time you read a book, a road sign or a recipe to your child, you are teaching them to read. At school/kindy, we read to children every day because we know that learning to read has to start with children seeing the reason to read. We think it's important to for every child to feel a connection to picture books, as well as other kinds of reading, because reading and listening to picture books helps develop oral language, vocabulary, concepts and knowledge about how books work. A connection to picture books also helps children learn to be writers.
- We already are! Reading starts with language and pretend play. Without really strong oral language, children struggle with reading and understanding the words and sentences in books. When children pretend play, like when they pretend they are serving you in a café or building a whole city with the blocks, they are building the concept of symbol. This means they understand that one thing can stand in for something else. Like the river stone can be the car in the city, or the string can be the spaghetti in the kitchen. When we read, we have to use symbol in a very sophisticated way: these squiggles represent sounds and words that have meaning. So, reading has to start with lots of pretend play – that's how oral language and the concept of symbol develop.





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- It's important to understand that reading is more than saying the words. There's some interesting research studies about children who were thought of as 'good readers' when they were 5 or 6 or 7, but who struggled when they were 8 or 9. They thought reading was just about saying the words right. When they were asked to read more complex texts, they couldn't understand what they were reading. They could say the words, but not understand what they mean. So, we start with comprehension – thinking and talking about and enjoying the books we read together. Once children have a connection to books and reading, we start teaching the word parts of being a reader.
- We teach children to read every day. Learning to read is complex and is more than saying the words. When we think about teaching children to read, we know it's important to read every day to children, to give them time to be readers every day, to have lots of opportunity to talk and build their oral language, as well as to build their knowledge of letters, sounds and words. But if we start too soon with the letters, sounds and words (or rush it too quickly), children are often burnt out by Year One. Or they 'word call' and don't understand what they read. We want children to see themselves as readers and want to read in their lives, so we think a lot about building this attitude to reading first, and then the mechanics come. We don't ignore them. We want children to know the joy of reading. This is the number one priority because if they feel joy they will want to read...so they read more...so their reading skills develop because they practise more.

