

Importance of Reading Aloud to Kids

The first day of school may be the first time some children have opened a book since spring. Especially in recent years, tablets and other electronic devices have become go-to resources for children to read, learn, and play, resulting in a decrease in the amount of books being read for fun. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) says that for children ages two to five, parents should limit non-educational screen time to about one hour per weekday and three hours per day on the weekend.

Spending time reading both in and out of the classroom is extremely beneficial for a child's development. According to the AAP, the stimulation from reading builds a child's motivation to learn – and reading aloud with young children is one of the most effective ways to expose them to enriched language and to encourage specific early literacy skills needed to promote school readiness.

In order to help reduce screen time and incorporate reading aloud to your kiddo as a part of your daily routine, Anne Orzechowski, an OSF HealthCare family medicine advanced practice nurse, recommends starting by bringing them to the library.

"I advise parents to take their kids to the library and just see what they are interested in. Let them explore in the kid section. Maybe they are interested in dinosaurs this week. Maybe it's something about construction – any topic that you think they may be interested in. And if they can even get their own library card, they may get excited just because they were able to check out the book themselves and get more interested in it, so that is kind of a fun tip," says Orzechowski.

In addition to giving your child the opportunity to explore a variety of books, Orzechowski adds that going to the library helps reduce screen time and tablet usage as opposed to when sitting at home.

Whether your child is a few months old or is heading off to fifth grade, it is never too late to read aloud to them. In turn, these read aloud sessions will encourage your child to want to read for fun on their own as well.

"If you're reading with your kid, they're more apt to do it. Reading makes a huge difference in the vocabulary that they speak and words they are exposed to. And it just kind of opens up the world, if you've got a book where you are talking about something like outer space and other things that they can learn," Orzechowski says.

The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) for Pediatrics says reading to your child helps to develop many skills, including recognizing letters, remembering stories, and learning words.

While parents are very busy and sometimes incorporating this extra time for reading may seem like an impossible task, Orzechowski says that it is not necessarily about the amount of time spent reading; it is important to make it a priority even if you do not finish the book or even a whole chapter. A few pages every day is key.

"I think we are all exhausted. Especially if you are raising a tiny kiddo – or a few of them – you may be just looking forward to bed time when you can just wind down and have a second of 'you time.' So I think you have to incorporate reading to your kid. Maybe you do dinner a little bit earlier. Maybe there is less screen time. I think it is something that you just have to put into your routine. Then once it turns into a habit, it becomes something you don't even think about," advises Orzechowski.

JAMA offers parents some tips for reading aloud to their kids, including: talking about the pictures in the books; having fun, like making silly animal noises if the book is about animals; encouraging your child to participate by asking them questions throughout the story; and reading books that might relate to what your child is experiencing in life.

Once you and your child have selected some books to start with, make it something to look forward to each day and have some fun with it.

Orzechowski says: "If you've got a wind down time, I think reading before bed is a great way to get kids into getting mellow, winding down, and getting those screen times off – so that's a really good time. But if your kid brings you a book and wants to read, any time is a good time to read a book."