

Five tips to help you make the most of reading to your children

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Reading aloud to children can encourage a love of reading. Credit: Shutterstock

Reading to your child is one of the most successful ways of instilling a love of reading in them. But in [our recent study](#), more than one-quarter of primary-school-aged respondents claimed they were never read to at home.

Children typically enjoy being read to, and see educational, social and emotional [benefits](#) to the practice. But families are busy, and finding time to read aloud can be eaten up by the demands of everyday life.

Not all parents have been read to themselves as children, so may not have experienced a model they can then follow with their own children. And many adult Australians may be [struggling readers](#) themselves.

With this in mind, here are five suggestions that can help make the experience of reading to your children fun, relaxing and educational.

1. Give it all your attention

For many people, the best time to read with their children is at night, once the children are in bed. But if you find your child too cranky and disengaged at this time (or if you are feeling tired yourself), you might want to try reading to them earlier in the day.

Whatever the time, it's important to give the book and your children all of your attention. Phones and other devices with enabled notifications should be switched off. Everyone should be comfortable, and children should associate time spent being read to with enjoyment.

Where possible, we strongly suggest reading to your child becomes part of the daily routine. The [more often](#) children are read to, the more substantial the [benefits](#). Reading to children is both an opportunity to model how the written word sounds and a chance for family bonding.

2. Engage with the story

Children don't typically enjoy having the story stopped every few seconds for comprehension checking, so we suggest you keep interruptions to a minimum.

But recapping is useful when picking up a book again after a break. If parents let their children provide this recap ("So, where are we up to?") this also enables informal comprehension checking. Opportunities for prediction are also beneficial ("Wow... what do you think might happen next!").

Sharing your response to a book and encouraging children's responses stimulates critical thinking. These techniques and others can enhance learning and comprehension, but they shouldn't upset the fluidity of the reading experience or turn it into a test.

You can share the task of the reading itself with your children if they want to. This is beneficial for a

range of [reading skills](#), such as reading comprehension, word recognition and vocabulary building.

3. There's no age limit

You can start reading to your child from early infancy to support their developing [language abilities](#), so it's never too early to start. The skills infants and [young children](#) develop through shared reading experiences can set them up for [literacy achievement](#) in their subsequent schooling years.

Reading to your children remains important beyond the early years, too, with continuing benefits for [literacy development](#) and [cognitive skills](#).

We should read to young people for [as long as possible](#). There is no age where the benefits of being read to completely expire.

Very [recent research](#) in the UK found struggling adolescent readers can make remarkable gains on their [reading comprehension](#) when [books](#) are read to them at school. This is perhaps due to the opportunity for students to enjoy books that are too hard for them to read themselves.

4. Pick a book you both enjoy

We suggest you select a book that interests both you and your child. Reading together is a great opportunity to share your passions while broadening your children's horizons through making diverse book choices.

Don't be afraid to start reading chapter books to your children while they are still very young. The age to begin this will vary depending on your child's attention span, but it's often possible to begin this with pre-schoolers.

As long as the story isn't too complex, children love to be taken on an enjoyable journey into books that are too hard for them to read independently. This can also help to extend child's vocabulary, among other benefits.

It's a good idea to take your children to the library and model how you choose interesting books for

shared reading. Research shows many [primary](#) and [high school](#) children are easily overwhelmed by choice when they attempt to pick what books to read independently, so helping them with this is a valuable skill.

5. Don't worry about your style

Not all of us are destined to be award-winning voice actors, and that's OK. It's great to use expression and adopt different voices for the characters in a book, but not everyone will feel able to do this.

At multiple points in our research, we've come across people who have praised the reading efforts of parents who weren't confident readers, but who prevailed nonetheless. For example, in our [recent paper](#) a respondent described being read to by her mother who struggled with dyslexia. This mother, and many other parents, have inspired a love of reading in their children through their persistence.

Being taken into the virtual reality of story is a memorable, pleasurable experience that stays with us forever. Reading aloud provides parents with a valuable opportunity to slow down, relax and share the wonderful world of books with their [children](#).

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