

School-Age Readers

Listening and Learning

From kindergarten through third grade, a child's ability to read grows by leaps and bounds. Although teachers provide lots of help, parents continue to play a very important role in their child's reading development.

Kids who are first learning to read get more information from listening to books read aloud than from reading them independently. This is especially true for vocabulary development — kids will learn much more about what words mean by hearing books read aloud and discussing new words with their parents than from reading on their own.

As your child's reading skills improve, he or she will begin to read independently. This doesn't mean, however, that you should stop reading to your child. Reading aloud together can help build vocabulary, improve reading skills, and foster a sense of closeness between you and your child. Encourage discussion about characters and share your reactions to books to help reinforce the connection between what you read and everyday life.

Your Growing Reader

Here's how reading usually progresses from kindergarten to third grade:

Kindergarten. This is the time when most kids begin learning to read. By the end of the school year they will probably know most letters and their sounds, be able to match words with the same beginning or ending sounds, and read/write several simple words. They might be able to read simple text as well.

First grade. In this year, most kids learn to read many more words. They sound out words with a variety of phonics patterns, recognize a growing list of words by sight, and connect meaning to the words and sentences they read. Most first-graders can read simple books independently by the end of the school year.

Second and third grade. Kids in second and third grade continue to learn more phonics patterns and sight words for reading and spelling, read aloud more expressively and fluently, use reading to discover more about the world around them, and perhaps show a preference for specific authors and types of books. You'll likely start to see a shift as your child begins to focus his/her energy on learning new information from text. Ideally, children at this age have learned how to read, and are now reading to learn.

If you have concerns about your child's reading level at any time, talk to your child's teacher, school counselor, and doctor. Kids who are not making good reading progress might have a reading disability, such as dyslexia. With the right educational help, most kids can become readers, but identifying the problem and addressing it early will bring about the best results.