

Reading to Young Children

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Young children who are read to regularly by family members experience multiple benefits.Â These include boosts in literacy development,[\[i\]](#) as well as social-emotional gains,[\[ii\]](#) and increased likelihood of later overall school success.[\[iii\]](#)

Importance

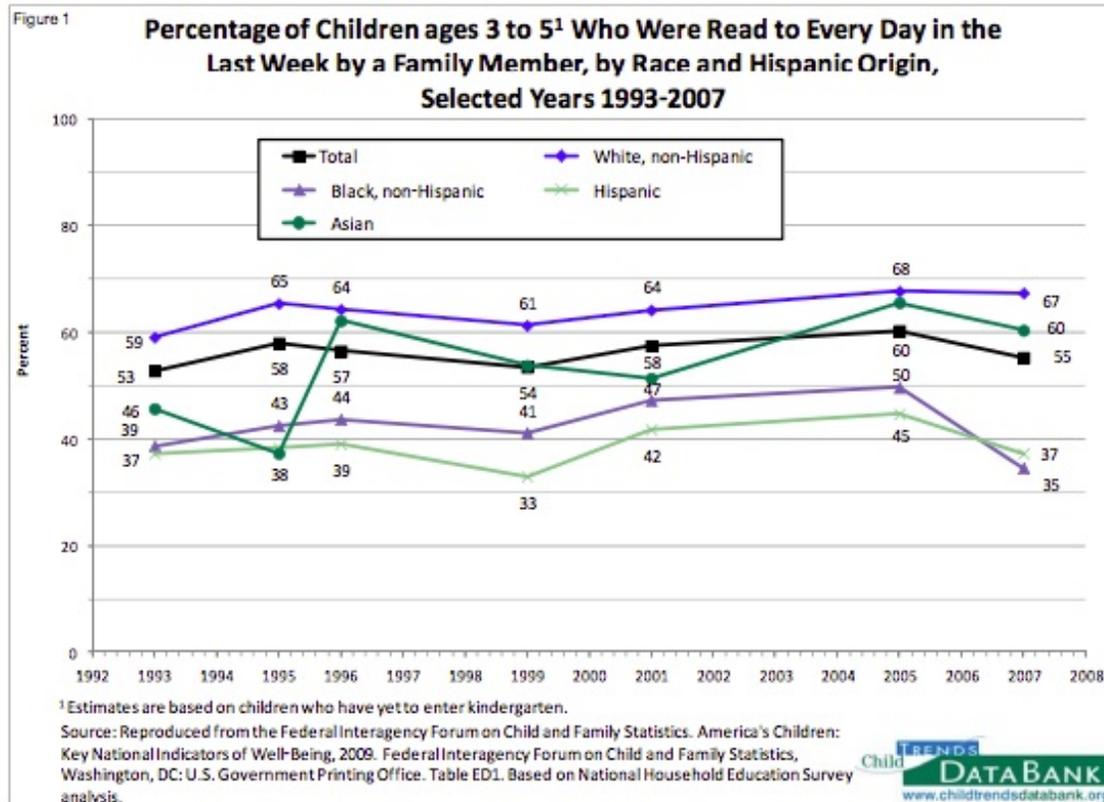
Children develop literacy skills and an awareness of language long before they are able to read.[\[i\]](#) Â Since language development is fundamental to all areas of learning, skills developed early in life can help set the stage for later school success. Â By reading aloud to their young children, parents help them acquire the skills they will need to be ready for school.[\[ii\]](#)

Young children who are regularly read to have a larger vocabulary, higher levels of phonological, letter name, and sound awareness, and better success at decoding words.[\[iii\]](#) The number of words in a childâ€™s vocabulary can be an important indicator of later academic success. Â Childrenâ€™s vocabulary use at age three is a strong predictor of language skill and reading comprehension at age 9-10.[\[iv\]](#) Â Further, vocabulary use in first grade can predict more than 30 percent of eleventh-grade reading comprehension.[\[v\]](#)[\[vi\]](#)

Children who lack a strong foundation of language awareness and literacy skills early in life are more likely to fall behind in school,[\[vii\]](#) and are more likely to drop out.[\[viii\]](#) Â Shared parent-child book reading during children's preschool years leads to higher reading achievement in elementary school,[\[ix\]](#)Â as well as greater enthusiasm for reading and learning.[\[x\]](#)Â In an international study involving 15-year-olds from 14 developed countries, students whose parents read books with them regularly during the first year of primary school scored an average of 14 points higher on a comprehensive reading assessment.[\[xi\]](#)

Trends

The percentage of young children who are read aloud to every day by a family member has shown little change between 1993 and 2007. In 2007, 55 percent of three- to five-year-old children (who had not yet entered kindergarten) were read to every day, compared with 53 percent in 1993. (Figure 1)

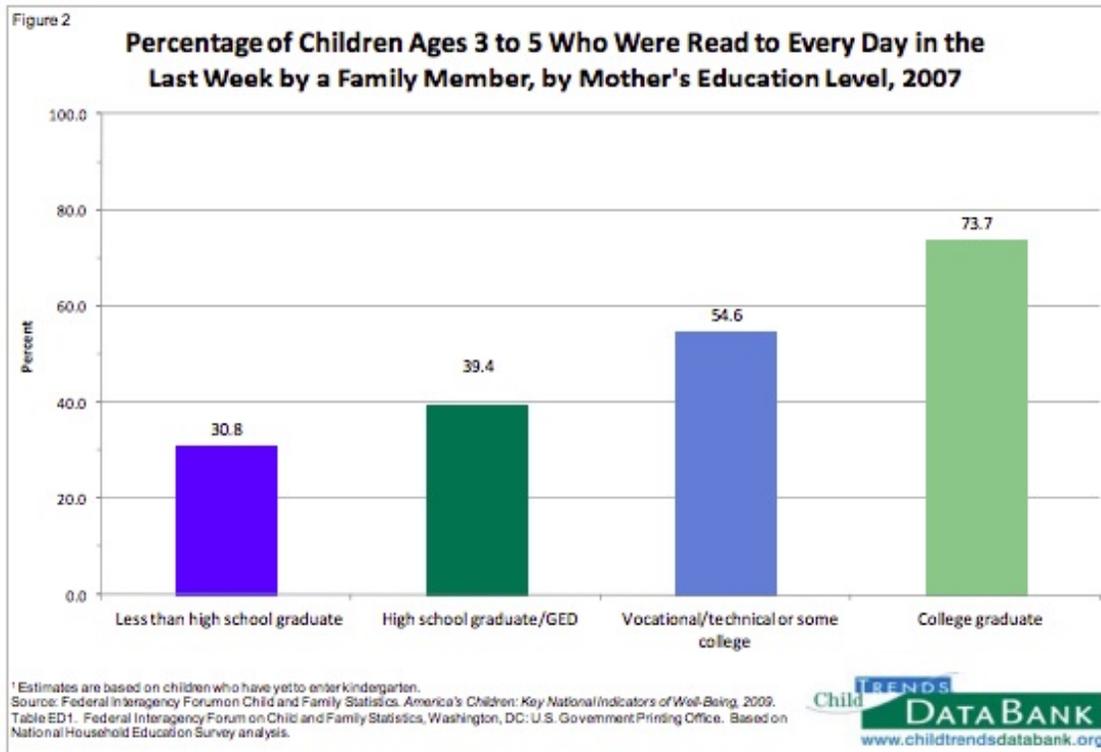


Differences by Race/Hispanic Origin^[ii]

Young children who are white or Asian are more likely to be read to than children who are either Hispanic or black. In 2007, 67 percent of white and 60 percent of Asian three- to five-year-olds were read to every day by a family member, compared with 35 percent of black children and 37 percent of Hispanic children. (Figure 1)

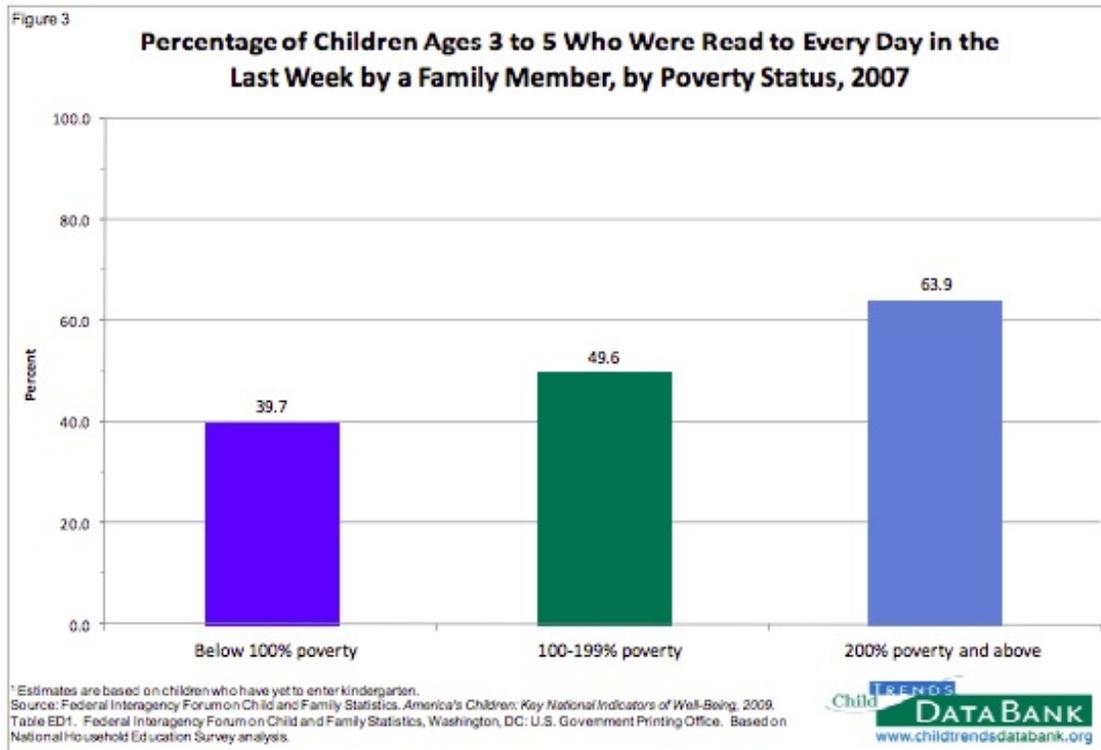
Differences by Mother's Education Level

Young children are more likely to be read to if their mothers have completed higher levels of education. In 2007, 74 percent of young children whose mothers had graduated from college were read to every day by a family member. In contrast, 55 percent of children whose mothers had some college education were read to every day, compared with 39 percent whose mothers had only finished high school and 31 percent whose mothers had not finished high school. (Figure 2)



Differences by Poverty Status

Young children living in poverty are less likely to be read to every day by a family member than are children living at or above the poverty line. In 2007, 40 percent of poor 3- to 5-year-olds were read to every day, compared with 50 percent of children in families at 100-199% of poverty, and 64 percent of children in families at 200% of poverty and above (Figure 3)



Differences by Family Type

Children living with two married parents are more likely to be read to every day than children with one or two unmarried parents. In 2007, 62 percent of children with two married parents were read to everyday, versus 43 percent of children with one parent, and 24 percent of children with two unmarried parents. (Appendix 1)

Differences by Mother's Employment Status

Children with mothers working part-time (less than 35 hours a week) or not in the labor force are more likely than other children to be read to every day. In 2007, 63 percent of children with mothers working part-time and 58 percent of children with mothers not in the labor force were read to every day, compared with 51 percent of children with mothers who worked full-time and 40 percent with mothers looking for work.

State and Local Estimates

State estimates for 2007 are available for ages 0-5 through the *National Survey of Children's Health* at the [Data Resource Center for Child & Adolescent Health](#).

International Estimates

None available.

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National Goals

The federal government has set a national goal through its *Healthy People 2020* initiative to increase the proportion of children who are read to by a parent every day, from 47.8 percent in 2007 to 52.6 percent in 2020. There is also a related goal to increase the proportion of children who are ready for school in all five domains of healthy development.

More information is available at:

<http://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topicsobjectives2020/objectiveslist.aspx?topicid=10>

(Goal EMC 1 and 2.3)

Though now outdated, in 1990 the *National Education Goals Panel* established its first National Education Goal: "By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn."^[i] To reach this goal, the Goals Panel created three objectives for families and communities.^Â The second objective stated, in part, that "every parent in the United States will be a child's first teacher and devote time each day to helping such parent's preschool child learn."^[ii] The Goals Panel also designated family-child reading and storytelling as an indicator of progress toward this goal.^[iii]

For additional information:

National Education Goals Panel (1999).^Â *The national education goals report: Building a nation of learners, 1999*.^Â Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

^Â <http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/negp/reports/99rpt.pdf>

What Works to Make Progress on This Indicator

See Child Trends's LINKS database ("Lifecourse Interventions to Nurture Kids

Successfully), for reviews of many rigorously evaluated programs, including the following which have been shown to be effective at increasing the frequency or benefit of parental reading to children:

- Reach Out and Read: <http://www.childtrends.org/?programs=reach-out-and-read-ror>
- Hear and Say Reading with Toddlers: <http://www.childtrends.org/?programs=hear-and-say-reading-with-toddlers>
- Parents as Teachers (PAT): <http://www.childtrends.org/?programs=parents-as-teachers>
- Even Start: <http://www.childtrends.org/?programs=even-start/a>

Related Indicators

- Early school readiness: <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=early-school-readiness>
- Reading proficiency: <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=reading-proficiency>
- Parental Warmth and Affection: <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=parental-warmth-and-affection>
- Parental Involvement in Schools: <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=parental-involvement-in-schools>

Definition

This indicator measures the percentage of pre-kindergarten children ages three to five who were read to every day in the week prior to the interview by a family member, as reported by an adult in the household.

Data Source

- Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. *America's Children: Key national indicators of well-being, 2009*. Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Based on National Household Education Survey analysis. Table ED1. Available at: <http://childstats.gov/americaschildren/tables.asp>

Raw Data Source

National Household Education Survey

<http://nces.ed.gov/nhes/>

Appendix 1: Percentage of Children ages 3 to 5¹ Who Were Read to Every Day in the Last Week by a Family Member, Selected Years, 1993-2007

	1993	1995	1996	1999	2001	2005	2007
Total	52.8	58.0	56.5	53.5	57.5	60.3	55.3
Gender							
Male	51.3	57.0	55.6	52.3	54.5	58.7	53.8
Female	54.4	59.0	57.4	54.8	60.5	62.1	56.9
Race and Hispanic origin							
White, non-Hispanic	59.1	65.4	64.3	61.3	64.2	67.7	67.4
Black, non-Hispanic	38.7	42.5	43.7	41.2	47.3	49.7	34.6
Hispanic²	37.3	38.3	39.1	33.0	41.8	44.7	37.3
Asian/Pacific Islander	45.7	37.3	62.2	53.8	51.4	65.6	60.4
Poverty Status³							
Below federal poverty level (FPL)	43.6	46.6	46.8	38.7	48.3	50.0	39.7
100-199% of FPL	49.1	55.7	52.0	51.4	51.8	59.5	49.6
200% of FPL and above	60.9	65.2	65.5	61.8	64.1	65.0	63.9
Family Type							
Two parents⁴	55.3	61.2	60.7	57.8	60.7	62.2	58.9
Two parents, married	â€”	â€”	â€”	â€”	61.1	63.3	61.9
Two parents, unmarried	â€”	â€”	â€”	â€”	56.8	49.8	24.4
One parent	46.0	49.2	45.6	42.4	47.2	53.0	42.7
No parents	45.9	51.6	47.9	50.6	52.8	64.2	38.0
	1993	1995	1996	1999	2001	2005	2007
Mother's level of education⁵							
Less than high school	36.9	39.9	37.4	38.7	41.2	41.3	30.8
High school graduate/GED	47.7	48.0	49.0	45.2	49.2	55.2	39.4

Vocational/technical/some college	56.5	63.6	61.8	53.0	59.8	59.8	54.6
College graduate	70.7	75.7	76.5	70.8	72.8	72.4	73.7
Mother's employment status^{5,6}							
Worked 35 hours or more per week	51.5	55.3	54.3	48.9	55.1	56.6	51.1
Worked less than 35 hours per week	55.9	63.1	58.7	55.6	62.6	60.6	63.0
Looking for Work	43.7	46.3	53.0	46.5	53.8	62.7	40.2
Not in labor force	54.8	59.8	59.4	59.7	58.2	64.5	57.9

¹ Estimates are based on children who have yet to enter kindergarten.² Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

³ Poverty estimates for 1993 are not comparable to later years because respondents were not asked exact household income.

⁴ Refers to adults' relationship to child and does not indicate marital status.

⁵ Children without mothers in the home are not included in estimates dealing with mother's education or mother's employment status.

⁶ Unemployed mothers are not shown separately but are included in the total.

Source: Reproduced from the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2009*. Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Table ED1. Based on National Household Education Survey analysis.

Endnotes

[1] Armbruster, B., Lehr, F., & Osborn, J. (2002). *Teaching our youngest: A guide for preschool teachers and child care and family providers*. Early Childhood Task Force. US Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Available at: <http://www.ed.gov/teachers/how/early/teachingouryoungest/index.html>

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