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Getting started at primary school

10 tips for parents to help their children to learn how to read and write

1 As a basic rule, do not try to teach your child.

Encourage their natural curiosity and offer them many opportunities to see texts in books, on signs, etiquettes etc. Pay attention to your child's questions about writing and answer them giving information but also signalling interest.

Tips to support your child:

2 Read to your child as often as possible.

Have the child choose the books or magazines, the time and duration themselves. When your child looks into a book with you, you may sometimes want to point at single words while reading. At the same time make short breaks when you speak, so that the child can notice which speech units and which writing units belong together.

3 Even if you read for yourself: Read the text aloud when your child is nearby.

Many children do not even know what their parents do when they look at a book or a newspaper. That way, children may get interested in what you are reading. You can then talk to them about a photo in a newspaper article and at the same time point to the text: "And here it says ..." This makes them aware of the difference between drawing and/or painting and reading/writing of texts.

4 Comment on your own reading and writing activities.

Talk when you write your shopping list. Ask your child: "What else do I have to write down so that we do not forget it when shopping?" Read the note in the shop again: "Here it says: *1 kilogram of sugar* - where do we find that? Ah, there's the *sugar!*" Speak quietly when you look for a product on the shelves at the supermarket: "Here's the *sugar*, there's the *salt* - where does it say *flour* on the packaging?"

5 Have your child guess what signs and inscriptions in the streets, on advertisements, and on packages mean.

Draw attention to similarities in words that interest you: "You see: The word *police* looks like *post office* at the beginning - and the words also sound the same: *p* for both *police* and *post office*."

There is no need, however, to practice the alphabet or the spelling of individual words with your child. It is sufficient to occasionally hint at signs, inscriptions etc. and to answer your child's questions when they ask you for information.

6 Play language games: "Which words sound the same at the beginning?" Make the task clear giving examples: *lamp* - *lorry* - *lolly* ...

Or pretend to be a robot: "I'm a robot, he always talks so choppy, what does

he mean when he says: *G - R - A - N - N - Y?*" - "Now you talk like a robot." Be careful, though: Do not spell, just say the sound.

Also rhymes and tasks like: "I spy with my little eye something beginning with an A", promote language awareness. In this way, the child becomes aware of the sounds of the language and connection between the letter/s and sound/s.

7 When your child paints pictures: Talk to them about what they paint.

From what your child says, phrase a simplified description of the image. Offer it as a title for the drawing: "Ah, 'the car is racing' - shall I write that down for you?"

Ask, for example, when painting a picture: "Shall I write your name next to it?" It is best to write it in CAPITAL letters, preferably 1 to 3 cm in size. Speak slowly while writing, so that the child sees how the spoken language turns into writing.

8 Make your own posters, small notebooks and booklets with your child.

Help your child to cut out words and pictures according to their wishes, to draw, stick things down, write ... Offer them your services as a secretary: "Shall I write this down for you?" Make a nice box for your child with their own words, which you give them step by step on small cards.

9 Accept scribbles and other writing attempts by your child.

Take what your child tells you about their first writing attempts seriously.

It is okay to make mistakes. Children learn their spoken language by practising it and mistakes are part of the learning process. Accept the writing of your child as the result of their efforts at that stage of their learning. Once your child goes to school, you may want to show them “what the words would look like written by an adult”. Teach your child how to write only words they explicitly ask for.

10 Encourage relatives or friends to write letters/e-mails to your child.

Ask them to write down what they want to reply to the letter. Read the single sentences aloud and at the end, read the whole letter again: “So, this is what we have written ...”

Brügelmann, H./Brinkmann, E. (1998): Die Schrift erfinden – Beobachtungshilfen und methodische Ideen für einen offenen Anfangsunterricht im Lesen und Schreiben. Libelle: CH-Lengwil (2. Aufl. 2005)

Brügelmann, H. (Hrsg.) (1998): Kinder lernen anders: vor der Schule – in der Schule. Libelle: CH-Lengwil (2. Aufl. 2000)

