

## Finding the right way

Nothing melts my heart more than watching a toddler with a book in his chubby hands turning the pages as if he is doing the most important work in the world.

Ah, an emerging reader.

It isn't a natural phase of development. Someone taught him this lesson.

In today's society not all parents understand that they have to make this happen as their child's first teacher. They take it for granted.

20 years ago, maybe even 10, I wouldn't have written this article.

What's changed? There is too much focus on devices and television providing entertainment and all the early learning required for preschool enrollment. It's easy. Simple. Parents don't have to do much, and as a result, communication skills are underdeveloped.

Relying on technology is not enough. It's the parental hands-on that is far more valuable. It requires time, which is a big issue with complicated family lifestyles.

Reading is not one more daily chore to be ticked off. When a parent puts it down at the bottom of the list the message echoes that literacy is not important in this household.

Let's get back to the toddler and how he becomes a reader. It's far more complicated than what I describe here is this space. I've pulled a couple highlights.

Since he was a baby – maybe even when he was in the womb – mama reads books to him. Lots and lots of lovely picture books. And over and over, too.

What a joyful time being on mama's lap cuddling with a book. Pure love.

Day Care providers. Childrens' librarians. Grandparents. And yes, papas, too. Everyone is part of the learning process.

Books become as familiar as the bottle, pacifier and well-worn “blankie.” Naptime and bedtimes routines are established with books nestled under the covers, too.

When mama turns the pages one by one, she talks and points to where she is reading next. She is modeling for her child left-right orientation of print.

There are certain books that become favorites and mama and toddler read them together so often that both have phrases and pages memorized they will never let go. (Say, “green eggs and ham,” and watch an adult’s face light up.)

Letting a toddler hold a sturdy book in his hands and permitting him to turn the pages on his own, is one of the phases of becoming a reader.

I often wonder what the toddler is thinking when he studies a page so intently. He points to this and that. He coos and makes animal sounds to show that he is familiar with dogs, cats and cows.

Just this morning as I was scrolling through my Facebook posts, I watched a video of a one-and-a-half year old boy with his book contented and happy. He was surrounded by stacks of books all for him. Maybe later he will go to the library and pick out another set.