

Family-Led Learning, a column by Kristin Marshall

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This depiction of natural learning represents my own point-of-view, and is not meant to represent the opinions of any other homelearning options. Please take what works for you and leave the rest behind.

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## Reading

From a natural learning perspective, reading occurs when a child is developmentally ready for it. How and when this happens is an individual matter. The key to natural learning is to know and respect each child's differences, with the long-term goal of developing a love of reading combined with self-confidence. To help you embrace your child's unique learning style, consider:

It is normal and healthy for a young child to begin reading "early" and spontaneously as a natural outgrowth of learning to talk.

It is normal and healthy for an older child to start reading "late," anytime through the teen years.

It is normal and healthy for an older child to have little or no interest in reading until it becomes relevant to his interests.

It is normal and healthy for a child to read voraciously everything she can lay her hands on.

It is normal and healthy for a child to learn to read from playing a video game, memorizing easy readers, reading comics and magazines, writing his own stories, messing around with an old typewriter, and from being read to aloud.

It is normal and healthy for a child to want to learn to read.

It is normal and healthy for a child to not want to learn to read. (That doesn't mean he won't change his mind later.)

It is normal and healthy for a child to feel bad about not being able to read yet.

It is normal and healthy for a child to feel comfortable about not being able to read yet.

It is normal and healthy for a child to find it difficult to distinguish between similar-shaped letters (such as b and d, p and q) until her vision is more mature.

It is normal and healthy for a child to enjoy being read to, well beyond the time when she can read for herself.

It is normal and healthy for a child to need to be read to, well beyond the time when parents think he can read for himself, because his own reading skills are not sophisticated enough yet to handle certain material.

It is normal and healthy for a child to learn to read quickly.

It is normal and healthy for a child to learn to read slowly.

It is normal and healthy for a child to enjoy reading out loud.

It is normal and healthy for a child to feel embarrassed about reading out loud.

It is normal and healthy for a child to read “baby books” to younger siblings, or even to himself, because they are easier than “regular books.”

It is normal and healthy for a child to read adult literature, from New Yorker magazines to The Globe and Mail to Sherlock Holmes to Jane Austen.

It is normal and healthy for a child to read a wide variety of materials from many different cultural biases, and to learn about life in different times and places, and to develop a broader understanding of humanity, because of it.

It is normal and healthy for a child to enjoy reading the same limited selection of materials over and over, and to develop confidence, enjoy a sense of familiarity and comfort, and develop a deeper understanding of the material because of it.

It is normal and healthy for a child to need help with reading, through learning about phonics or using other reading aids or programs.

It is normal and healthy for a child to read spontaneously without the slightest need for phonics or other reading aids or programs.

It is normal and healthy for a child to read silly things, like comics and trashy juvenile series fiction.

It is normal and healthy for a child to read serious, thoughtful things, like religious documents, political / philosophical literature, classic books from history, and poetry.

It is normal and healthy for a child to inherit a love of reading from parents who enjoy reading.

It is normal and healthy for a child to develop a love of reading even in a family where reading is not a priority.

It is normal and healthy for a child to read only as a matter of necessity.

It is normal and healthy for a child to resist reading, because it is expected of her.

It is normal and healthy for a child to embrace reading, because it is expected of him.

It is normal and healthy for a child to resent adult condescension in trying to “teach” reading.

It is normal and healthy for a child to utterly fail to learn to read through an organized program that claims to teach reading.

It is normal and healthy for a child to eagerly reach out for help in learning to read.

It is normal and healthy for a child to imitate what she sees her parents and older siblings do—whether that is reading, watching tv, or playing sports.

It is normal and healthy for a child to “pick up” reading skills without anyone trying to make it happen.

It is normal and healthy for a child who starts reading “late” to progress very quickly from being a “beginning reader” to an advanced, fluent reader in a few months.

Happy reading—however it happens for each individual in your family!