



Doctors Promoting Child Development with Books



Reach Out and Read®: Making Books Part of a Healthy Childhood

Reach Out and Read (ROR) was developed by pediatricians and early childhood educators to promote school success by supporting reading aloud as part of routine pediatric care. Exposure to books and reading in the first years of life increases the probability of healthy child development and decreases the chance of school failure. **ROR is the success story of a public-private partnership, which has helped primary care physicians practice medicine in a new way.** By promoting literacy, doctors and nurses expand their traditional practice and responsibilities to make a positive difference in children's developmental skills and consequently in the nation's economic health.

The Problem: School Failure Damages the Child – and the US Economy

Many children who ultimately fail in school start out with reading difficulties. This initial specific problem leads to generalized school failure, truancy and dropping out, which in turn puts young adults at higher risk of early pregnancy, drug and alcohol use, and criminal activity. Adults with low literacy skills have very poor economic potential. Since 20% of US workers are functionally illiterate, this problem is not only a tragedy for each individual but also has a significant effect on the ability of the United States to compete in a global economy.

The Starting Point: Early Interactions and Language Exposure are Critical

School reform is vital, but too much essential time is lost before classroom-based interventions – even the ones that happen in preschool – reach a child. When very young children develop in a deprived home environment, their innate interest in learning and their proverbial curiosity are seriously compromised; this places children at a severe disadvantage even by the age of preschool. Intervening early to improve the home learning environment for disadvantaged children, will ensure that they are ready to learn when they enter school. Nobel economist James J. Heckman has stated that it is important to start early to increase the productivity of our work force because skills beget skills and learning begets learning. His work shows that economic returns on dollars invested in early education are as high as 15-17% per year - higher than other traditional economic development strategies.

Every baby is born with a brain that is ready to learn. Experiences, especially everyday interactions with parents, shape the brain architecture that supports the complex learning challenges of school and adult daily life. For example, early language skills, the foundation for later reading ability, are based primarily on language exposure—resulting from parents and other adults talking to young children. Research shows that the more words parents use when speaking to an 8-month-old infant, the greater the size of their child's vocabulary at age three. Since studies show that

children from low-income families hear fewer words and learn fewer words, they are at great social and educational risk due to their limited vocabularies. Children must reach the age of three without suffering delays in their language and their learning.

The Solution: Reading Aloud Makes Language a Part of Children's Daily Lives

The obvious solution is for adults to speak to young children as an everyday nurturing activity. Research shows that words heard on television and radio programs do not have the same impact as live spoken conversation. This is in part because children want to learn language in order to communicate with the people who mean the most to them: their parents. Of all parent-child activities, reading aloud provides the richest exposure to language. Reading aloud is not only one of the best activities to stimulate language and cognitive skills; it also builds motivation, curiosity, and memory. Giving parents the information and the tools—beautiful, appealing children's books—to make reading aloud a daily activity helps parents prevent their children from falling behind.

The Opportunity: Reach Out and Read

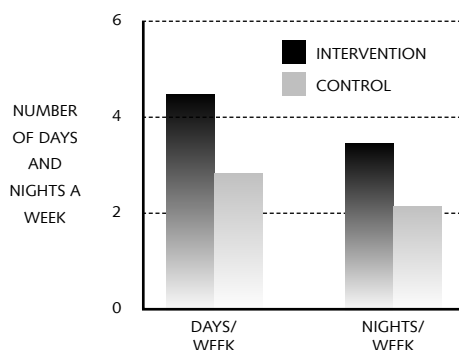
For almost two decades, through the Reach Out and Read program, doctors and nurses have gone beyond traditional medical care and reached out to give parents information on how to read to children at different ages. Along with this advice, the doctors give each young patient a developmentally and culturally appropriate book to take home so that parents can read aloud.

Measuring the Impact: Evidence-Based Intervention in Early Childhood

Research findings from many published studies show Reach Out and Read is effective. Compared to families that have not participated in Reach Out and Read, parents who have received the ROR intervention are significantly more likely to read to their children and have more children's books in the home. Most important, children served by the ROR program show an increase of 4-8 points on vocabulary tests. For a two-year-old child, this increase represents an approximate six-month gain, developmentally speaking, preventing the 'falling behind' observed and measured in low-income children.

Frequency of Reading Aloud

(High et. al., 2000)



“Educating parents about the importance of reading should become a standard part of what pediatricians do, much as health and safety guidance is now. What pediatricians do through programs like Reach Out and Read is just as important as immunizations, car seats, vitamins and good nutrition.”

First Lady Laura Bush

American Academy of Pediatrics National Meeting, 2002

The Cost: \$27.50 Per Child For a Lifetime of Learning

The primary cost of Reach Out and Read is the cost of the children's books. At deep discounts these books average \$2.75. Since children average two visits to their doctor per year, the program costs \$5.50 per child per year. Why is Reach Out and Read so effective and inexpensive?

Parent Involvement: Parents are the target of this effort; without them, no intervention in the early years of a child's life is likely to be successful.

A Trusted Messenger: Parents trust and value the advice they receive from their child's physician. Reach Out and Read is unique in using a trusted authority figure and the special setting of the medical visit, to promote a child's learning.

Broad Scope and Reach: The program reaches all children who visit medical providers for primary care and is repeated every time they visit the doctor until age five.

Guidance Parents Can Follow: The doctors and nurses are not just giving advice to parents but are also giving them the tools to follow that advice in the form of free books.

Hope for Educational Success: Reach Out and Read explicitly ties reading aloud to later school success; this strategy matches the aspiration that all parents have for their children to be healthy and succeed in life.

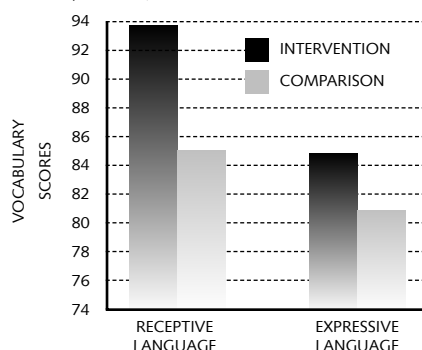
Positive Reinforcement: Unlike many interventions that physicians suggest (changing a child's diet or safety proofing a house), which require strong motivation on the parent's part, reading aloud is also driven by the child: by age one, if there are books in the home, children will "demand" to hear them read aloud. The positive, loving attention centering around reading aloud motivates children to initiate the interaction again and again.

The Policy Response: Strong Public-Private Support For Reach Out and Read

Increasing and consistent evidence showing the effectiveness of the ROR model, together with mounting awareness of the need, have led the policy and business communities and public sector to offer financial support to purchase books for Reach Out and Read. As a result, Reach Out and Read has expanded from its original site in Boston to over 2,700 pediatric sites nationally and distributes over 3.8 million books to over 2.3 million children per year.

Children's Expressive and Receptive Language Competencies

(Mendelsohn et. al., 2001)



"Reach Out and Read is a pioneering program in early childhood education. It's a practical and cost-effective way to encourage many more parents to start reading aloud to their young children. The result is that language scores are improved for children as young as 18 months. The federal aid we make available leverages tens of millions of non-federal dollars for the program as well, and the children who are helped will benefit all their lives. The modest current investment leads to savings of billions of dollars in public costs for remedial education. Prevention works in health care, and it can work in education too."

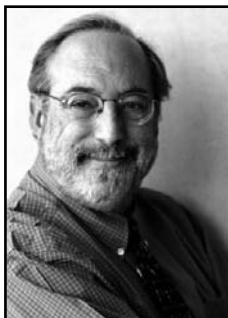
The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy, United States Senator

Next Step: Giving Books Should Be As Routine As Giving Shots

The goal of Reach Out and Read is to ensure that literacy-related advice and children's books are given as routinely as immunizations are administered at pediatric visits: both are exceptionally important. Endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, ROR has changed the way pediatrics is practiced in the US by giving doctors an evidence-based strategy to promote child development and learning. These doctors and nurses have contributed their time to this endeavor; collectively, they are donating tens of thousands of hours by dedicating a piece of every checkup to books and literacy guidance.

Current public-private partnerships supporting evidence-based strategies such as Reach Out and Read are expanding so that children from low-income families will grow up with books and experience regular reading aloud and richer language exposure during the first five years of life. As a result, these children will develop the vocabularies and book-related skills necessary to read, complete school, and succeed in life.

The success of each child -- and the collective success of higher numbers of at-risk children all over the country -- will mean increased national productivity and economic security.



Barry S. Zuckerman, MD
Chair of the Board/CEO, Reach Out and Read; Professor and Chairman Department of Pediatrics, Boston Medical Center/Boston University School of Medicine

Perspectives on ROR's Impact:

"Mellon has been a long-term advocate of Reach Out and Read, because of its ability to work with both the private and public sectors to achieve real change in our community. When \$500,000 from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts was made available for matching grants to support ROR, Mellon was delighted to be the first corporation to pledge its support."

*David Lamere, Vice Chairman, Mellon Financial Corporation;
Chairman and CEO, Mellon New England*

"My goal is that giving books will become as routine as immunizations. I believe that both are important."

*Barry Zuckerman, MD
Chair of the Board and CEO, Reach Out and Read*

"One of the most cost-effective ways to improve our workforce is to invest in early education. By reaching disadvantaged families early in children's lives with books and guidance, Reach Out and Read helps to achieve that goal."

*Marshall Carter, Chairman and CEO (retired)
State Street Bank and Trust*

"When you're caught up in the day-to-day survival game, although you realize literacy is important, purchasing books for your children is not always something you're able to get around to doing--food and shelter and clothing have to be your priorities. But you still have to take them to the doctor."

*A Reach Out and Read Parent
Boston, MA*

"When I look at my patients and see the children hugging books, I see children who have a real chance of learning to read on schedule and succeeding in school."

*Perri Klass, MD
President and Medical Director, Reach Out and Read*



Perri Klass, MD
Medical Director and President, Reach Out and Read; Associate Professor of Pediatrics, Boston University School of Medicine

Reach Out and Read

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