

ages of the children in your family, you might focus on different aspects of learning about letters, words and print.

Young children can explore the headlines, picking out the first letters in their names, identifying other letters, or as their skills develop, sounding out the words. Headlines use bigger type and are easier for children to see. Place a piece of newspaper on the table, give your child a crayon and ask him to circle all the Ms he sees on the page (focus on the headlines). Acknowledge what he finds. "Yes, Michael, that is an M! Just like in your name!"

Comics also are great for young children. Let them find the "speech" of the cartoon characters. Read what the character says so the child knows that those words belong to the character. Point out that conversation, like this character's speech, is written using letters and words.

Older children and adults might enjoy playing around with letters and words by doing the puzzles found in the paper. Anagrams, crossword puzzles, word searches and scrambles can all be fun family activities. Think about how you can extend these puzzle activities for more learning. How can you find the definitions of the words in the word search?

From the newspaper, children can also learn how print works. They learn that you open a newspaper and turn the pages from right to left, but that we read from left to right. Our eyes move from paragraph to paragraph through each column. When we reach the bottom of a column, we sweep back up to start over again with another column. These are all important concepts of print to understand when reading.

Vocabulary

Identifying and sounding out words is one thing; understanding what they mean is another. The newspaper is full of new words to explore. The key is to find out what children are interested in, what sparks their interest and gets them reading.

Locate articles you think your older children will like. Think about their interests (sports, cooking or music, for example)

and search for newspaper articles they will enjoy. Scan the articles yourself. Are there new words you want your child to look up in a dictionary or research on the Internet?

Help your child use new vocabulary words in a sentence. Make a game of it. Say that everyone in the family will use that new word in conversation at least twice in the next week. Using new vocabulary words in context makes the word meaningful and solidifies learning.

Writing. What's not to learn about writing from the newspaper? The newspaper is all about sharing news, ideas and information through a written format. This material has to be communicated in a way that everyone can read and understand. The newspaper is full of opportunities for children and adults to experience writing for a purpose.

As a family, your first question might have to do with suitable topics for writing. Write about what you know, what gets you fired up and what interests you. Write about things you believe in or something you want to tell others. Newspapers offer a number of venues to share opinions.

Is someone in your family trying to make a difficult decision? Practice writing a letter to the local advice columnist. Do you need an answer to an entertainment question? Many newspapers have a trivia column that accepts inquiries. Letters to the editor are great places for families to express their opinions about a community issue. Why not write the letter as a family? Decide on what you want to say and have everyone contribute.

The op-ed page of the newspaper often accepts guest articles. Your local newspaper also might have an

Internet blog or a bulletin board where people can write and post questions on particular issues. Help children know what is appropriate to post and remember that parental supervision is recommended when accessing the Internet.

Reading and Comprehension

We read to understand. What we choose to read is often based on what we need to know or what we would like to know more about. We also choose to read for entertainment. Comprehension has to do with how well people understand what they have read.

You can help your children increase their comprehension skills in a number of ways. Ask children questions about articles or stories they read in the newspaper. (Of course, this means that you need to read the article, too.) Hold discussions about the topic and ask children to share their opinions. See how well they can connect those ideas to their own lives. Focus on topics of interest to them. "Did you see the article in the sports section about the University of Kentucky basketball team? Isn't that your favorite team? What did the article say about the new coach?"

Newspapers provide us with a wealth of new information every single day. Building knowledge from what we read is a stepping stone to success. Make reading the newspaper a family project every day or every week. Try some of the ideas provided in this article, and in the others throughout this special section, to increase your family's enjoyment of reading. Make use of that old friend, your newspaper, that's delivered right to your doorstep every single day.

