

Reading with your toddler boosts more than just language skills

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(HealthDay)—All those hours spent reading bedtime stories may pay off

for you and your little ones beyond language and brain development: New research suggests it's also good for social and behavioral skills.

Evaluating prior studies on parent-child reading in [children](#) up to age 6, researchers in Hong Kong found positive effects for both sides in so-called psychosocial functioning, which includes mental well-being, emotions, behavior and relationships with others.

"Now we feel more confident to say that reading to children is good for their social and behavior skills," said study author Qian-Wen Xie. She's a doctoral candidate in the University of Hong Kong's department of social work and social administration.

"Reading with children is not only for having a smart child, but also for having a happy child and a good parent-child relationship as well," Xie said.

Prior research had established a variety of benefits from parent-child book reading, particularly in the areas of language and literacy development. This activity in early childhood also strongly predicts children's [brain development](#) and later school achievement, according to the latest study.

Xie and her colleagues analyzed 19 prior studies that included nearly 3,300 families. Study designs differed, but focused either on children aged 0 to 3, or 3 to 6.

The amount of time children spent reading with parents wasn't factored into results. But all studies that were evaluated included comparisons between parent-child book reading intervention groups who received training, supportive materials or other encouraging services, and control groups that did not.

Psychosocial functioning of children and parents was measured using tests of social-emotional adjustment, behavior problems, quality of life, reading interest, stress and/or depression, parenting competence and parent-child relationship, among others.

"It involves people's ability to care for themselves or to work, [their] ability to make a positive evaluation of themselves and their lives, or [their] ability to [feel] well-being from meaningful relationships," Xie explained.

U.S. experts said they weren't surprised by the findings.

"I think it's pretty well-known that reading is one key intervention that can improve language development down the road, and this adds to that," said Dr. David Paul. He's chair of pediatrics at Christiana Care Health System in Wilmington, Del.

"If you're a parent, it's another strong reason to take time to read to your children," Paul added. "It's hard to say if it's better than sports [shared between parent and child] or better than [screen time](#). We can't say from the study that reading is better than screen time, but I can say as a pediatrician that this is something that has great potential for your children."

William Bryson-Brockmann is chief of the division of developmental and behavioral pediatrics at NYU Winthrop Hospital in Mineola, N.Y. He said the new research was unique since it evaluated multiple studies and also looked at parent-child relationships.

"What's valuable is that [reading together] is affecting both sides, parent and child," Bryson-Brockmann said. "There's a joy to it, and that's the real power. It's not just reading the book, it's associating mom or dad with a book and having a good time."

The study was published online March 27 in the journal *Pediatrics*.

More information: Qian-Wen Xie, M.S.W., doctoral candidate, department of social work and social administration, University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam, Hong Kong; William Bryson-Brockmann, Ph.D., chief, division of developmental and behavioral pediatrics, NYU Winthrop Hospital, Mineola, N.Y.; David A. Paul, M.D., chair, department of pediatrics, and clinical leader, Women and Children's Service Line, Christiana Care Health System, Wilmington, Del.; March 27, 2018, online issue, *Pediatrics*

The Reach Out and Read program offers more on the [benefits of reading aloud to young children](#).

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