

LEARNING TO READ WITH THE CEREAL BOX

In today's busy lifestyle, families sometimes have too much to do. So *the time parents have with their children might need to do double-time*. Here's one way to help your young child over breakfast develop the skills he can use later in learning to read:

If you sit down with your child for breakfast, you can use the cereal box for fun with the skills he'll need later, when he's learning to read. Are there illustrations on the box? You could play a variation on the old game, "I spy." *Just choose one of the pictures and see if he can find it*. Then he can pick another one for you to find. If that is too easy, you can make this game harder by choosing smaller and smaller pictures. *This is good practice for paying attention to smaller and smaller details*—and that's a skill young children will need later, when they're learning to recognize letters in the alphabet.

If your child is already interested in the alphabet, *you might pick one of the biggest letters on the box*—it would be great if the box has the letter that starts your child's name—and point it out to him. *See if he can find other letters like it*. Many children enjoy learning the letters in their own name first. So see if your child can find his.

Often words are repeated on cereal boxes. There might also be pictures that match those words—perhaps a big strawberry or a handful of raisins. *Can your child find the words for the pictures?* Many children guess at what words say—they see the picture of milk and they guess that **c a l c i u m** spells **m i l k**.

If your child makes a guess like that, be glad. That's a very smart guess! It means *she already understands that those little squiggles we call letters and words have something to do with the pictures*. She's already beginning to understand the way written language is related to the words we use to talk about things. So be sure to tell your child she made a very good guess when you point out what the word **m i l k** really is.

Please be sure to have fun when you're playing with the cereal box. We don't want to turn breakfast time into a stressful lesson. Remember: *just having a conversation together at the beginning of the day is a wonderful way to help your child get ready for when the time comes to learn to read*.