

LEARNING TO READ: AT THE LAUNDROMAT

Next time you go to the laundromat, look for ways your child can help. Here are some ways this ordinary chore can help him get ready to read!

First, look at the signs: is there a machine to make change? Can your child recognize the big **C**? Does she know the other letters in **change**, too? If not, then here's a chance to practice. Do you need change? Let your child count the quarters when they come out of the machine and again when you feed them into the machine. That's great practice with counting.

If the washers and dryers are numbered, here's another chance to help your preschooler learn to read those numbers. Point out the numbers on the machines you're using. See if he can remember what they were when it's time to move the laundry from the washers to the dryers, or from the dryers to the folding table.

And is there also a machine that sells soap? What words are on it? A big **S O A P**? or **D E T E R G E N T**? Does your child know these letters yet? If you sound them out, can she guess what they say and what the machine sells? Can she find the soap you usually buy, just by looking for its name?

Even if you don't really have to, sometimes read the instructions on the washing machine and dryer out loud. Help your child notice the little words, **H O T** and **C O L D**, for example. Here's another good time to sound out letters. Can your child hear the **T** at the end of **H O T**? What about **C O L D**? Can he hear there's a difference in the way these two words sound? Does he notice their letters are different, too?

When you sort your laundry, help your child understand your system—dark clothes in one pile, light in another. Heavy work clothes in one pile, silky delicates in another. Putting things in categories is a skill children will use later in school. Here's a good time to practice it.

And when the clothes are dry and you're folding them, don't shoo your child away. Even if it does take a little longer, let her help. Even a very young child can match socks and fold hand towels and put clothes in piles if you teach her how. ***This job helps children look for things that are alike and to notice when they're different.*** That's another skill they'll need when they're in school, looking at letters, words and numbers.

Letting young children help with REAL jobs makes them feel important. And ***that's a great feeling.*** It's good to know you're growing up and that you're able to help with big people's work. That's what's called ***self-esteem***. That feeling, plus real experience learning to recognize letters and guessing what words mean, can add up later for success when your child's ready to learn to read in school.