



# Help Your Child Become a Great Reader

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## Schools teach children to read, right?

Well, yes and no. For some children, the school reading program doesn't succeed as well as we'd like. And for every child, parents can make a big difference in helping children learn to read better.

What can a parent do? How are good readers raised?

**Here are five things you can do to help your child become a great reader.**

**1. Talk With Your Child.** The child who speaks easily, who can describe and explain things well, is the one who will learn to read most easily. Saying words helps people read words.

This is important even with infants and toddlers. Parents who talk with their babies, even before the baby can say words, have babies who talk earlier. With children of all ages, a key skill for parents is to take time to explain things with descriptive sentences. For example, if your child says "cow," you could answer "Yeah, a cow."

But your child will learn more if you elaborate on his or her sentences. In this example you might say "Yes, that's a black and white Holstein cow, and she's having grass for breakfast."

### **2. Create A Good Reading Climate.**

Children learn to read better if their home has newspapers, magazines, and books, and especially if they are read to regularly by you.

One essential ingredient for every young reader is an adult who likes reading. Children learn by observing adults. Let them learn that reading is important, because you discuss things you have read, and ask them about things they have read. Let them learn from your example that reading is valuable and fun.

Don't be afraid if you aren't a very good reader yourself. If you enjoy reading, then you are a good example, no matter what it is you enjoy reading. If you are trying to improve your own reading skills, then you may be the best example a child can have.

To keep it fun, avoid pressuring your young reader to perform. Reading progresses best in a relaxed atmosphere.

### **3. Read Along The Way.**

Reading is part of everyday life. Many children learn to read through everyday activities.

- When you are driving, point out what the signs say. Even before a child knows letters, that child can learn the word "stop" on a stop sign. Street names look different even before a child can correctly "sound them out." Make a game of learning to identify words.
- The same game can be played in stores. Because children know what a milk carton looks like, they can begin to "read" the word on the label. The grocery store is a ready-made reading lab. Read cereal boxes at breakfast.
- You can also play family games that teach reading. Some favorites are Lotto, Scrabble, and Word Roll.

### **4. Read Together Out Loud.**

This may sound old-fashioned, but it's one of the best ways to help a child become a good reader. Children need to hear how good sentences sound before reading them makes sense. They benefit in the same way that a music student benefits from hearing a polished concert. Hearing a story read aloud teaches a child what reading is all about.

Reading aloud is a great activity for the whole family.

- Choose books or stories that everyone can enjoy.

- Older children can take turns being the reader too (let better readers read longer).
- You may want to set aside no-TV nights just for reading and other family activities.

Children often remember the times when their parents read to them as among their happiest family times.

To make reading aloud successful, consider these tips.

- Let your child help select the stories to be read. Sometimes a child will want to hear the same story over and over again; that's OK.
- Make sure you quit reading when the young ones begin to lose interest.
- Try to read to your child at least 10 minutes each day.

Story-telling is like reading out loud, and can be just as valuable.

- Your child can contribute, perhaps by ending stories you begin.
- Children love to have their stories written down or typed, so they can be held and read again.
- Older children can begin to write down their own stories, which is great for their literacy skills.

## 5. Be Part Of The Team.

When parents and teachers work together, the children really benefit. Too often, parents and teachers only talk together when they are required to, or when there is a problem.

Surprise your child's reading teacher! Call her or him and ask how you can help at home with what your child is learning at school. Some schools provide parents with materials to use at home—for example reading games and books.

- Your child's teacher will probably be happy to work even harder for your child if she/he knows that you care enough to work on reading at home.

### Some Activities To Do with Your Child

Make a book together. You will need some paper, a stapler, and some imagination.

- Have your child come up with a story and write it on the paper.
- Have your child draw pictures to go with the story.
- Make a cover page for your book and staple it together.
- Read the story with your child. (If your child cannot write yet, write the story down for him and add in his pictures.)
- Encourage your child to write letters. Even if a grandparent lives next door your child can write her a letter and deliver it herself. Children love to get mail. Suggest that your child and a friend write letters to each other.

The more "fun" we make reading and writing, the more children like to do it.

### For more ideas, click on:

U.S. Department of Education

<http://www.greatschools.net/cgi-bin/showarticle/ca/44/mss>

How To Read With Your Child: 10 Ways to Get Results

## Reading For The Whole Family

Watching television is a passive activity. Reading books can stimulate lively discussions about thoughts, fears, feelings, and experiences. This activity offers two options for using books to bring the family together.

What do you need?

- Public library or bookstore
- Variety of books to choose from

How long will it take?

- It varies, depending on the ages and attention spans of your children.

### What do you do?

**Option A:** Reading Aloud Together. Choose books that will appeal to the ages and interests of family members.

### Here are some tips to keep in mind:

1. For reading to younger children, ask your librarian for possible books to read.

2. Check out the following resources, which describe books for children at various age levels:

For Reading Out Loud! A Guide to Sharing Books With Children, Margaret Mary Kimmel & Elizabeth Segal, New York: Delacorte Press. The Read Aloud Handbook, Jim Trelease, New York: Penguin Books.

3. Don't give up reading aloud just because your child is too big to hold on your lap.

#### **Consider these options:**

- Children's magazines like "Cricket" and "Cobblestone" have many good stories for children aged 5 to 11.
- "Reader's Digest," National Geographic" and similar magazines have varied and interesting topics for children over 12.
- If your junior high or high school son or daughter agrees, read aloud from books assigned in English or literature classes.

4. Find a book that appeals to you and your spouse and try reading to each other at bedtime.

5. Reading aloud should and can be a pleasurable experience for everyone, if the following guidelines are followed:

- Choose a comfortable location, free from distractions.
- Don't force anyone to read aloud. Some people would rather just listen.
- Pause occasionally to share reactions and observations about the story.
- Don't overdo it! If people get distracted or fidgety, it's time to close the book.

#### **Option B: Reading Individually Together**

Encourage family members to share the reading habit as follows:

- Take monthly trips to the library so each family member can pick out books that appeal to him/her.

Set aside one evening each week for a "book discussion." This could take place during the family's dinner hour or at a separate time and place. Share:

- title and author of the book they're reading
- things they especially like about the book
- other reactions and comments

#### **Option C: Audiobooks**

Audiobooks can be a valuable tool for supporting a child's reading development. Platforms like Audible and LibriVox offer a wide selection of children's stories that are pre-recorded and read aloud—many of which are available for free.

- Talk with your child about which stories or books they're interested in, and work together to build a personalized virtual library.
- Encourage your child to follow along with the words on the screen or in a printed version as they listen.
- Make time to enjoy these stories together and have conversations about what you've read.

## References

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