

How can I encourage my child to read?

Read aloud

Start early to read aloud to your children. Studies show that sensory and cognitive abilities are well developed in infants at six months old. The results are positive about reading aloud to children.

The U. S. Department of Education's booklet , *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, says "the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success is reading aloud to children."

Be a role model

One of the most important things parents and grandparents can do is to be "reading role models." If children see the adults in a family reading for pleasure, children will see reading as an enjoyable activity.

Know your children

Before selecting books for children, know their reading abilities and interests. If a book is uninteresting or beyond their abilities, they will close the book.

Talk with your children

Have conversations of substance with them. Listen and talk to them. Encourage youngsters to talk about what they do and how they feel. Talking with your children gives them a sense of belonging. It also develops their use and understanding of good language, which is the basis for reading.

Set aside time for reading

Designate 15 to 20 minutes a day - after dinner, before bedtime, whatever fits your family's schedule - as a regular time when family members read for pleasure.

Make reading a part of your family routine: share poems, articles, and books with each other. Encourage reading first as an important skill, then as a good habit.

Reverse the Pattern

When children begin to read, reverse the read-aloud pattern: let them read to you. They will be eager to show their new skills. When children read aloud, it improves their vocabulary and understanding of the written word. It also develops self-confidence.

Involve older children

Encourage older children to read to younger siblings. Two benefits will result; it reinforces an older child's reading skills while it develops a younger sister's or brother's interest in books. Another advantage: it brings siblings together in a shared activity.

Make reading special

Establish particular places for children to read and to keep their own books - a shelf, a carton, or a basket. Having such places of their own makes reading and books special for youngsters. Children will learn to value reading and books. And they will often re-read favorite stories from their personal libraries.

Make reading fun

Make reading fun by showing children the adventure and thrill of learning about different people, places, and things. Congratulate them - don't overdo this - on new things they have learned.

Above all do not nag or criticize a child who isn't reading well. Such criticism only erodes self-esteem. Reading should be an enjoyable activity.

Stock up

Take the initiative when you encourage reading. Have lots of different materials available - books, short stories, paperbacks, magazines, newspapers, even comic books. Youngsters can be motivated to read if reading materials are at hand.

Give books as gifts

For birthdays and other gift-giving occasions, give books or magazine subscriptions that reflect the interest and abilities of your children.

Read more than books

When youngsters are learning to read, urge them to take advantage of the world around them. Children love to read such things as road signs, recipe instructions, and cereal boxes.

Even shopping for groceries can be an adventure in reading, because many boxes and cans have large print, short words, and pictures to help give clues to words.

Look for books together

Trips to libraries and bookstores can be regular outings. Share the experience browsing or shopping for - and discussing - books with your children. Talking about books is conversation of substance: it stimulates the imagination and curiosity.

Provide new experiences

The more experiences children have, the greater knowledge and understanding they will have when they read. A variety of experiences - a trip to the zoo or the store - is particularly important for pre-school and elementary school children.

Whether seeing new places or familiar objects, this helps to sharpen your children's powers of observation by pointing out and explaining things to them.

Set realistic goals

The magic usually occurs between the first and third grades. Some mechanism - still unknown to scientists - triggers the ability to decode words and sentences. Reading begins! But don't expect dramatic progress.

Children begin reading at different ages, and they develop at their own paces. So don't push or expect too much at first, or they may refuse to read altogether.

If you perceive problems, seek help from a teacher or the school reading specialist. If you don't like your child's choices of books, keep it to yourself. Reading something is usually better than reading nothing at all.

Gradually, after a child builds a reading base and gains confidence in his or her ability, he or she will become interested in a wider variety of literature.

Use the Library

One of the your best resources is the local library. And it is free! Get to know the children's section of the library. When you are looking for good children's books, one of the most valuable guides you have is a good children's librarian.

Ask questions

As children reach age 12, schoolwork may compete with reading for pleasure. Peer pressure often suggests that reading then becomes a "school only" activity. Preteens and teens may welcome the acknowledgement that this is not so.

Ask your children about books they are reading. What is the plot? Who are the main characters? Keep asking - so they know that you are interested in how the story progresses.

Limit television time

Guide program selection for your children. Discuss it with them. Described as the "plug-in-drug" by author Marie Winn, television today is the schools' biggest competitor for the education of children's minds.

Learn what makes a good children's book

For a children's book to be good, it must be attractive, well designed, accurate, and have a strong story line and memorable characters. Books appearing on recommended lists time and again have won the respect of children, teachers, and librarians.

The real test of a good book is simply the reaction children have to it. If your children like a book, take the tip from them, temper it with common sense, and you will guide them to interesting books.

Learn even more

Learn more for yourself about children's books. In the last three years, many books about children's books have been written for parents. They provide useful information on selecting books - what's good, what's bad, and trends. Ask your librarian about these books.



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