

Helping Children Develop a Love for Reading

by Becky L. Spivey, M.Ed.

Reading skills lay the foundation for your child's success inside, outside, and beyond school. Reading comprehension ensures understanding of the written word and opens the doors for future success. Helping children develop an understanding of letters, words, and their meanings begins long before entering school.

Books stir the senses, inspire imagination, and spark a love of reading that will last a lifetime. Parents can encourage their children to read and enjoy books in many simple and creative ways. Use the following tips to promote a love of books and reading in your family.

Provide Opportunities That Encourage Your Child to Read

- Use your local and school libraries as the most economical way to fill your child's world with great books that are age-appropriate, current, and support your child's interests.
- Get each family member a library card. Community library cards are free. Make a date with your child/children once or twice a month to visit libraries in your area. Check on story times, author visits, and book fairs that your library promotes to the community.
- Buy/Checkout books on your child's area of interest (i.e., skateboarding, hairstyles, young celebrities, or sports, etc.).
- Allow your child to choose an easy book. Reading books at a lower level or the same books over and over helps increase confidence and fluency.
- Read to your child often. Sit next to your child and get comfortable together on a sofa or in a comfortable chair to prolong reading time.
- Keep a variety of books and other reading materials around the house (i.e., magazines, comic books, coffee table books, library books, and newspapers). Read together. Keep the story flowing by offering to read every other page, paragraph, or sentence.
- When shopping, encourage your child to help you by reading labels, food containers, signs, ads, billboards, and any other printed materials.
- Buy/Checkout/Borrow/Trade educational games that help build vocabulary skills, visual memory, and word recognition. Ask other parents that have children your child's age to trade and swap books and games. It is cost effective!



- Play word games aloud with your child during free moments in the car, at the doctor's office, while cooking or cleaning, or when taking a walk outside. For example, "Name all the fruits you can" or "Think of all the words that rhyme with cat" or "How many words do you know that start with the letter d?" With older children, spelling games, crossword puzzle books, word searches, etc., are entertaining as well as great vocabulary builders. To avoid frustration, start with puzzles that are not too difficult.
- Use magnetic letters and boards to spell messages, build sentences, or practice spelling words. Leave special messages for each other using the magnets.
- Praise your child for the progress that he/she makes with reading expression, fluency, vocabulary, and word recognition. Compliment their decoding skills when reading new words and for being attentive to their tasks.
- When your child is reading, periodically interrupt and ask questions that promote higher-level thinking and reasoning. For example, "How are these two boys alike?" "What do you think will happen next?" "How would you feel in this situation?" or, "How do you think the story should end?"
- Create a reading corner with special shelves full of books, a chair, and sufficient light. Make sure the shelves are easily accessible for safety as well as for reshelving the books once your child finishes reading them.
- Give a diary, stationery, or notebook to your child/children for keeping a journal of events, daily activities, trips, etc.
- Have your child read to you from the newspaper as you do quiet household chores (e.g., folding laundry, dusting, cooking, or baking). Let your child scan the newspaper and select titles, photo captions, ads, or whatever interests him/her to read. Have younger children read the cartoons and continue the story frames with what they think will happen next.
- Encourage your child to read to younger siblings, friends, or other family members. Do not force your child to read to the family "for entertainment" if he/she is uncomfortable reading aloud or is not confident in his/her reading ability.



Parents are able to set the best examples for good reading habits. Children emulate the actions of their parents. Parents are their children's greatest and most influential teachers. When your child sees his/her parents reading for enjoyment, he/she will assume that reading is a fun and natural experience. The rewards of good reading skills last a lifetime.