

Help your child to enjoy reading

Parents often ask for advice on how to help their children with reading.

General Points

1. These notes mention more than thirty different ideas relating to children's reading. Don't try to do everything listed. Select some ideas that suit your own situation and try these at first. Later you can move onto new ones.
2. Reading is important in every child's life. Being good at reading will help in all school work, particularly writing and spelling in primary school. But reading is also for enjoyment and for leisure. It is very worthwhile trying to help children to develop good attitudes to reading.
3. When young children read stories or when they hear them read aloud, they build up a storehouse of words and of ways to say things. They also enlarge their knowledge of life in general and develop ways to say things. They also enlarge their knowledge of life in general and develop ways of thinking about the world. This is good and useful. (Check if there is a story hour in your local library).
4. All children pass through similar stages of development but at different stages. This is true of learning such things as reading or mathematics. It is also true of attitudes to learning and to what we are concerned with in these notes – their ability to enjoy reading. Children from the same family attending the same school may reach different mile-stones at different ages. In becoming interested readers, most children pass through ascending levels of development for example, they may for a time show interest only in picture books or comics but given enough time and encouragement will pass through such a phase to new levels of interest. It is not necessary to rush children through these phases: in most cases, it is better to allow the younger reader to gain pleasure and to grow in confidence at each level before moving on. Once the reading habit is established, it should last throughout life.
5. The most powerful encouragement to young children comes from seeing their parents read. When parents give example reading when they can and showing that they value books and reading, children as always will imitate. Seeing their parents read makes them realise that reading is important.
6. Join the library yourself and enrol your children too. Make regular arrangements for changing books, particularly during holidays. Help your children to make their own choices, rarely make the choices for them yourself.
7. Encourage reading in free time and during holidays. Whenever possible, leave reading material handy. Organise a place in the home for book and for

anything else that can be read. It is helpful if there is a quiet place in the house where uninterrupted reading can take place.

8. Consider buying books as often as toys. Books make excellent presents, for your children or your friends.
9. Praise your child's interest in books and in reading. Remember that leisure reading will supplement and support school work.

Pre-school and early school years

10. The child who can speak well and has a wide vocabulary has a great advantage in learning to read. Learning to listen, to hear and to understand begin at birth and continue non-stop ever after. As soon as possible, children should be encouraged to talk, to answer and to ask questions. Their own questions should always be answered. Parents should use correct language in preference to baby-talk, and should always give the correct names for objects. It is wise to say things correctly for the child who has made an incorrect use of words, but it is not necessary to make the child repeat the corrected statement.
11. As soon as children are ready, it is worthwhile setting time aside for looking at books and for reading to them. This activity is most valuable in helping them to become familiar with books, to learn what they are for and to know how to handle them. It is a way of sharing with children a pleasurable activity that will grow and grow and lead in time to other benefits. It is never too early to take a child to the library.
12. Look at pictures with your children. There is an early stage of development in which children learn to recognise in a picture something which they know in reality. At a later stage, look at pictures containing several objects. Ask the child to name them and give the names of anything she/he does not know. A further level of development is when children can say what is happening in a picture.
13. Watch out for signs that your child is growing as a reader. For example, long before they can read either words or sentences, young children can sometimes be seen going through their favourite book, looking at the pictures, turning the pages and reciting their own version of the story. This is excellent.
14. At the initial stages of buying books for your children or when helping to select books in the library, the choice should include mostly picture books (at first without print or with one word or one sentence captions) or books to read aloud. Look for a pre-reading section in your library.
15. Sometimes when children become familiar with a certain story and grow to like it, they will join in rhymes or will speak repetitive pieces ("I'll huff and I'll puff" or "All the better to ...") from the text. They may also imitate the voices of characters, using the same tone as the person who reads them: for example Daddy Bear will say "Who was sleeping in my bed?" with a deeper voice than Baby Bear, or the Wolf's words will be spoken much more roughly than those of Red Riding Hood. Children love repetition, rhyme riddles and jingles, and it is valuable when they become involved in a story in the manner described here.
16. When reading to young children, always arrange that they can see the book

“right-side-up”, point frequently to the lines of print as you read along, and sometimes ask the child to turn over the page.

17. In time, when children become familiar with a story, it is useful to ask them to retell it in their own way. They may need help: ask questions such as “what happened next?” or “who came along then?” Encourage them to imitate the voices of the characters or to “act “ suitable parts.
18. When children become more experienced still, it is worthwhile asking them to guess at or to predict what is to come. Tell them the name of a book or story, show the picture on the cover and ask for a guess as to what the story will be. At other times, stop reading in mid-story and see if they can predict what will happen next.
19. If long periods are to be spent travelling by car, they can sometimes be used for learning. Stories may be read or simple games involving reading may be played.
20. Parents will frequently notice that their children will not allow skipping part of a familiar story. This is a good sign. It shows that they are interested that they are paying attention and that they fully understand the story. Sometimes when reading a familiar story, it is interesting to skip a word or to pause just before the last words in a sentence and see if the listener can supply the missing parts. Also, when reading, put emphasis on rhyming words; children who have learned to hear rhyme will find less difficulty with some aspects of learning to read and spell.
21. From 3 or 4 years onwards, children like to have their own books. When buying a book, if your child is with you, allow some element of choice provided that this does not result in a completely useless purchase.
22. If there is a much loved story that has been repeated so often that it has been memorised in almost every detail, parent and child can take turns about at reading the pages.
23. Take an interest in school reading activities; if you are getting involved in teaching your child, ask advice at the school about the way in which you can best help.
24. Limit and moderate TV viewing. Make use of whatever view by discussing what they see and improving their ability to talk about their idea. If there is reading material e.g. annuals, books relating to favourite programmes make use of it.

Children who can read independently

25. Don't stop reading to children as soon as they have mastered the beginnings of reading by themselves. Continue as long as there is still some pleasure in the activity.
26. Boys need encouragement in connection with reading. Very often, and wrongly, reading is not seen as a masculine activity. Fathers can help here.
27. If a child seems reluctant to read, the best hope of change is in finding reading material relating to some special interest that he/she may have. Ask the librarian for help and advice. At certain times, there may be special activities in the library e.g. Children's Book-Week, special exhibitions.
28. Use TV and other interests to develop reading pursuits. Encourage activities that involve reading (or writing) such as keeping scrapbooks and diaries, collecting stamps and postcards.
29. When children are able to do so allow them to read to you or to their younger brothers and sisters. This serves as a great boost to their confidence; it provides an opportunity to display their newly acquired skills.
30. Buy games which encourage reading e.g. Scrabble or Monopoly. Look for books about your child's favourite games.
31. Take an interest in school reading activities. See 23 above.
32. Help your children to read more book materials e.g. TV time-tables, sporting

tables, household brochures.

33. Reading is a skill for lifelong use. Try to give it a practical value, but look also on reading for pleasure as something important in its own right.

Using your local library

34. Enrol your children at an early age. There is no charge for children under 16 years.
35. Enable them to change their books regularly.
36. Cultivate a love of books and tendency to care for them.
37. Ask the librarian about books in which you are interested but which you cannot find on the library shelves, Use can be made of special collections in the library.
38. Remember that example is important. Be a regular reader yourself.