

Promoting reading in school-aged children

Reading is an important part of your child's overall health and well-being. Children who don't learn to read well may have emotional and behavioural problems later in life. The skills your child learns early in life will help him well into adulthood.

You can help your child develop good reading skills with these suggestions:

- **Read to your child.**
 - Make reading part of every day. Even just a few minutes will make a difference. It's also a great way to create a special bond with your child.
 - Continue to read out loud to your child even when he can read alone.
 - Read books that are a bit above your child's reading level, as long as they are books that he can still understand and enjoy.
- **Read *with* your child.** Children who are learning to read need to practice. If your child is doing well, regular reading at home is a chance for her to show off her skills. If your child is having trouble, it provides a safe place to practice with someone she trusts.
- **Be a role model.** Your children should see you enjoying reading. If he sees you and other family members reading books, newspapers, and magazines, he'll learn that reading is important, fun and valuable.
- **Consider creating a special reading space** in your home that is quiet and cozy. Keep books close to this area.
- **Use rhymes, games and songs.** Singing traditional songs and telling stories can all enhance your child's learning opportunities. This can also be a great way to expose your child to other languages.
- **Ask the experts for help.** Teachers and librarians are good sources of advice for books that are right for your child's age and reading level. Bookstore staff can be helpful too.
- **Visit the library, and create one at home.** Get your child a library card as soon as you can (even babies can get one). Make library visits part of your routine. If there are more books than toys in the house, your child is more likely to pick up a book when there's nothing to do.

- **Limit screen time.** Create time for reading by limiting the amount of time your child spends in front of a screen, including televisions, computers, tablets, smartphones, and video games.
- **Give your child some control over who reads and when.** It's important to support your child if he decides to take on a longer book. Take turns reading, perhaps alternating paragraphs or pages. Or you can "act out" the story—your child can read the dialogue, and you can narrate by reading the rest of the text.
- **Give your child a choice of books.** Present a few books that are the right type and length for your child, and let him choose. Children might choose the biggest (or smallest) book, or the one with the most attractive cover. Students who are behind in their reading level may not want to be seen with a book that is "babyish," so they may choose books that are too hard for them. Sometimes, books for older students with low reading levels may be boring. A good strategy is to say, "You choose one, I choose one."
- **Get them hooked on a series.** Ask friends and librarians what they recommend. Finding out what happens next to favourite characters can be motivation to read the next book.
- **Keep a record of what your child is reading.** Use an incentive chart to help encourage more reading, or keep a reading diary or simple list. In a reading diary, children can also write down their thoughts about the books. Keep in mind that some children are motivated by keeping track of what they have read. For others who don't enjoy it, do not insist that they keep a reading log.
- **Practise writing.** Reading and writing go together. Children can practise their writing skills by making lists, keeping a journal, making a catalogue of their collections, or writing to friends, family, or favourite authors (many have websites with an address for fan mail).
- **If your child has trouble reading, choose stories that she can relate to.** Look for stories they already know or that offer experiences they can relate to or illustrations they recognize.
- **Encourage your child to read to your pets.** They can be very patient listeners, especially for nervous readers. Some libraries and animal shelters even have pet reading buddy programs.
- **Focus on meaning.** Reading well is about understanding meaning, not just knowing how to say the words.
 - If your child is stuck on a word, don't just "sound it out." Talk about the text and ask questions.

- Help your child figure out the word by re-reading the rest of the page, or looking at pictures.
 - Try not to interrupt unless the mistake affects your child's ability to understand the text.
 - At the end of the paragraph or chapter, go back to words your child didn't know or had trouble sounding out and review them together.
- **If your child is an impatient reader, choose books that have movement.** Books with short chapters or "cliff-hangers" encourage children to keep reading. Use sound effects and different voices to help keep the story interesting.
 - **Have fun with word play.** Tell jokes with puns, and play games that involve words, like Scrabble, Boggle and hangman. Do crossword puzzles together. Play "I spy" with letter sounds instead of colours.
 - **Opportunities to read are everywhere.** Encourage your child to read street signs, the back of the cereal box, or even sports stats. Your child might also enjoy reading non-fiction or comic books. Recipes help children learn to read for detail—leaving out just one ingredient can lead to disaster! Time on the Internet can also involve reading, but it is a good idea to always supervise time spent online.
 - **Give books and magazine subscriptions as gifts.** Suggest a book exchange instead of gifts at your child's next party. Gently used books can also be used instead of loot bags.
 - **Books aren't just for bedtime.** Get your child in the habit of bringing something to read when in the car, at the bus stop, or in a waiting room.
 - **Monitor text media.** Since they involve reading and writing, sending and receiving a text message or e-mail from a friend or relative can be a great way to learn to type and read. However, parents should make sure children are using the technology safely Older children will need to be reminded that the informal style used for texting is not appropriate for school assignments and everyday life.
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