

Parents and family members are children's first teachers. And they are educators' most valuable allies in teaching children to read. Families lay the foundation for readers long before children enter school. Schools build on that foundation.

Each year, however, fewer and fewer children enter kindergarten ready to learn to read. For many reasons, they simply do not have a strong base on which educators can build. As a result, too many are failing to keep up in class.

It's time to take aggressive steps to ensure that all children master this most basic of skills. By the time they leave third grade, all children must be able to read on their own and read well. Reading is the foundation for their success—not just in school—but in life.

Here are several ideas families can use to help children become readers. They are intended for children from birth through preschool, kindergartners, and children in first through third grades.



Work With Schools and Teachers

1. Make sure school-age children attend school every day. Frequent absence from school is one reason children fall behind in reading.
2. Send children to school ready to learn. Make sure they are well-rested, are dressed comfortably, and have had breakfast before class begins.
3. Establish routine time for reading, meals, bed times, and getting ready for school so children know what to expect each day. Make reading part of the daily routine.
4. Have children spend more time reading and less time watching television. Limit television viewing to 10 or fewer hours per week. Participate in programs your child's school may sponsor to turn television off for a week to encourage more reading.
5. Set a regular time for homework. If a child is too young to have homework, use this time to talk about schoolwork. In this way, when the child begins to get homework, there will already be a time set aside for it.
6. Talk to children's teachers often about what they are learning in reading class. Ask about children's progress, the skills being taught, and the stories and books used in class. Find out what you can do at home to support children as readers.

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Build a Foundation for Reading

1. Talk with the children in your family as much as possible. In day-to-day conversations, speak in complete sentences and encourage children to do the same. Encourage them to ask questions, tell stories, and discuss ideas.



2. Talk to children about what they did that day. This will show your interest, help you keep in touch with what they are learning, and provide another opportunity for children to express themselves.
3. Teach young children the names of items they see

each day, such as the clothing they wear and objects around the home.

4. Teach young children nursery rhymes and songs. Recite and sing them together.
5. Take children to visit interesting places in the neighborhood such as parks, playgrounds, grocery stores, libraries, bookstores, and historical sites. Discuss these places or read about them with children.
6. Ask friends and family members who do not live close by to write to your child. Children enjoy reading cards and letters they get in the mail. Encourage them to write back.

Read, Read, Read

1. Read with children every day (or as many days per week as possible). Begin reading to them when they are still babies. Read stories and books aloud to toddlers and preschoolers. Don't wait until they enter school.



2. Give children something to look forward to each day. Read to them every day at the same time. Let them choose the book or story they'd like you to read. Don't hesitate to read favorite stories again and again.
3. Even after children can read on their own, keep reading to them so they can enjoy stories and books that interest them but are still too hard for them to read.

4. When you read with a child:
 - Let the child choose which story or book to read.
 - Find a comfortable well-lit place.
 - Cuddle or sit close, and make sure you can both see the book.
 - Read aloud with expression.
 - Have the child turn the pages of the book.



- Draw the child's attention to the pictures.
 - For young readers, move your finger from word to word as you read.
 - After you finish reading the story, spend a few minutes talking about it.
 - Ask if the child enjoyed the story.
 - Be prepared to read favorite stories many times.
 - Make reading time fun for both of you.
5. Involve other family members in reading. Ask an older brother or sister, or a grandparent, to read with a child.
 6. Take children to reading circles, storytelling hours, or other activities at the local library, community association, or children's center.
 7. Set a good example as a reader. Read every day at home. If you have little time for reading books, read the newspaper, a magazine, or the mail each day. Let children see that reading is a daily part of your life. Let them know why you read and how much you enjoy it.
 8. Have children read to you. Listen carefully. It's just as important as reading to them. Take turns reading paragraphs or pages. And make sure to praise children's reading.



Create a Home Library

1. Have lots of books and magazines available for children. Young children "read" books and magazines by turning pages and looking at pictures.
2. Visit the library at your neighborhood school. Meet the librarian and ask about books you can read with children at home.
3. Visit a local public library and get each child in your home a library card. Visit the library often. Don't hesitate to ask the library staff about books children enjoy.
4. If possible, give children their own special bookshelf or bookcase at home.
5. Ask other adults, particularly parents, to name books their children enjoy reading. Read the book section of the newspaper for reviews of new children's books.
6. Shop for low-price books at garage and yard sales, swap meets, and used bookstores. Have children shop with you and have them select their own books.
7. If a child has a favorite videotape, movie, or television show, ask the school or community librarian for books on related topics.
8. Help children create their own books. Write captions for pictures young children draw and assemble the pictures into a book. Older children may enjoy keeping a daily journal. Most children enjoy reading their own writing.
9. Encourage relatives and friends to give children subscriptions to magazines, or books, as gifts. If they are unsure of what might interest a child, a gift certificate at a local bookstore is a good alternative.