

A Guide to Reading With Your Child

Brought to you by the editors of *Building Readers*

WHY does reading matter?

Why is reading so important? Imagine that your child's education is a marathon. It's long, complicated, and full of twists and turns.

Now imagine that reading is the starting block. Without the ability to read, the race can't even begin. If she cannot read well, your child will likely struggle to succeed in school.

Mold her into a good reader, and there's no limit to what she can achieve.

Unfortunately, poor reading is by far the single most common reason for children being held back or placed in remedial classes.

Without the ability to read, kids are denied a chance to expand their minds and to encounter new ideas. Not only that, they're missing out on one of life's most pleasurable activities.

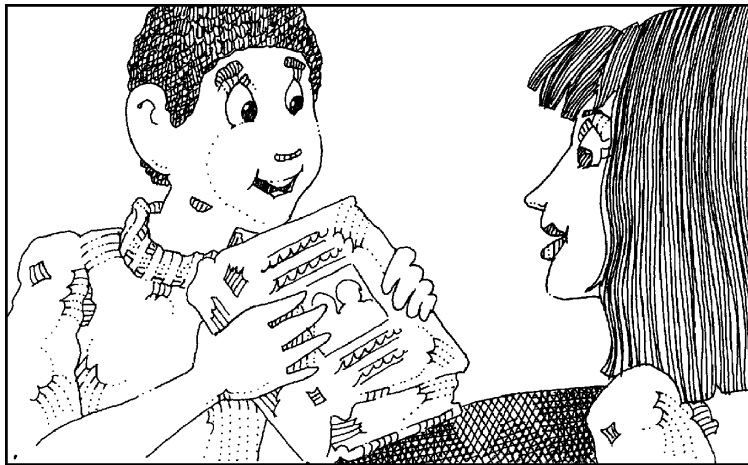
But what does this mean for parents? Clearly, it means that you should do all you can to ensure your child's success in reading. It means getting involved with your child's school, working closely with her teacher and making your home as reading and writing-rich as possible.

By surrounding your child with books and supporting her efforts to read, you'll enrich her in ways you never imagined. Here's a guide to getting started.

WHO should read?

Everyone, of course! But since you can only control your own home, make sure it's one that reads. *Here are the important players when it comes to making your family a literary one:*

- **Mom and Dad.** Parents have a huge influence on whether or not their children read for pleasure. So instead of always reaching for the remote control, pick up a book instead. Your child will notice, and he'll eventually follow your lead.



- **The teacher.** Since she'll formally teach your elementary schooler to read, she'll also have an effect on your child's attitude toward books.

Speak with your child's teacher frequently, and see which fun classroom activities you can recreate at home.

- **Your child.** She'll only learn to love reading if she has a chance to explore

books, magazines and newspapers, so don't overschedule her day. Quiet time at home was made for reading.

WHAT is reading with your child?

Well, a lot of it is just how it sounds: curling up together with a good book. But teaching him to love and appreciate reading is much more than that.

There are countless other ways to shape your child into a strong reader. *Here are a few:*

- **Listen to stories on tape.** Let the cassette handle the vocals while you and your child follow along in the book.
- **Have him read to you.** As children become better readers, they may wish to be read to less and less. This doesn't mean your time together has to lessen, though. If he'd rather not hear a story, ask

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him to read one out loud while you fold laundry or sort the mail.

- **Find her an audience.** Many elementary schoolers are proud of their ability to read. If your child is one of them, encourage her to show off her skills by reading to grandparents, younger siblings and other relatives.
- **Talk with him frequently.** Spend some time every day simply talking with your child. Let him tell you about his activities, describe a funny scene or explain something new he learned at school. Talking is a language exercise that builds vocabulary skills.
- **Write it down.** Reading and writing go hand in hand, so give your child lots of chances to jot down stories, wishes or thoughts.
- **Really listen.** Rather than doing 10 things at once while she's talking about something she's read, make eye contact and pay attention.

WHEN should you read with your child?

There's no bad time to read with your child, or to encourage her to read, but some times of the day are better than others.

That old standby, bedtime, works well for many families, but if it's not for you, *try squeezing 20–30 minutes of book time into these moments:*

- **Before your child's bath.** As the day winds down, snag a few minutes to look through a favorite book together. Read a page aloud, then have him read the next.
Let him sound out the difficult words, and offer lots of praise when he does.
- **When the TV is off.** It's your job to limit the amount of time your child watches the tube, uses the computer and plays video games. If the house is unplugged, she's more likely to seek out a book.
- **While you're making dinner.** Have your child grab a book and read to you while you're cooking. As he improves, ask him to read sections of the newspaper aloud (check first to make sure they're not too violent or scary).
- **While you're driving.** Reading in the car isn't just a great way to pass the miles on a long trip—it's also wonderful for enriching your child's mind while you tool around town. Have her read one of a few "car only" books to you as you drive. She may start looking forward to errands.

WHERE should you read with your child?

EVERYWHERE! Keep his world filled with books, and he's likely to start flipping through them. Aside from the importance of a well-stocked bookshelf, *here are some other ideas for where to read with your child:*

- **At the library.** The library is an incredible resource for both you and your child, so try to visit it often. Besides just checking out books, see if there are any special programs she can participate in (such as group story times or reading clubs).
- **In a special area.** Create a small space in your home devoted to letters and words.
Fill it with books, children's magazines, old newspapers, writing tablets, pencils, markers and crayons. Let your child spend lots of time there. Don't worry if the space is really small—even a card table will work!
- **In the car.** Keep a stash of books in the car at all times. If there are several interesting titles available, those lengthy car trips or traffic tie-ups may not feel quite so long.
- **Everywhere else.** Nearly every place is a good place when it comes to nurturing a love of reading in your child. With your guidance, encouragement and good example, that love will continue to blossom and grow forever.

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