

How You Can Help Your Children Become Better Readers—Even When They Don't Have a Book in Their Hands

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Parents want their children to be strong readers. They see reading ability as the ticket to a good college and a successful life. The first problem, however, may be getting children to read at all.

The best way to encourage reading is to make it enjoyable. Like the rest of us, children are likely to spend more time at activities they enjoy. Then they excel in those areas that command their time.

Some children, however, have such a strong aversion to reading that they can't start the upward spiral. Many of the following suggestions for parents will help these children improve vital comprehension skills—even without a book in their hands. This can jump-start children's enjoyment of reading—and lead to improved reading skills.

- Emphasize the importance of communication by modeling and expecting good listening. Be sure you have your child's attention before giving important information.
- Encourage your child to talk with you—to share ideas, to ask questions. Prompt your child in order to probe more deeply or to clarify thinking.
- Help your child to recognize that things are not equally important. Help him identify relationships—similarities, opposites, sequence, cause, examples, etc.
- Make vocabulary study a family activity.
- Do not push young children to read. They may learn to read using a part of the brain that will stunt reading ability forever.
- Read. Read to your child, with your child, in front of your child. Show that you value reading for both information and enjoyment.
- Read some of the books or topics your child is reading so you can share ideas.
- If you are reading to or with your child, pause occasionally to ask questions about the story. Include questions that don't have right and wrong answers.
- Help your child compare what is read with his own experience. Look for both differences and similarities.
- If your child enjoys being read to but doesn't like to read, have him evaluated by a developmental optometrist. A physical problem might be making reading uncomfortable.
- Lead your reluctant reader to books on topics of interest to him.
- Ignore oral errors if meaning is correct.
- If your child seems unaware of an error that changes or destroys meaning, ask at the end of the sentence, "Did that make sense?"
- Provide a variety of experiences for your child (these do not all need to cost money). Many comprehension problems arise because a child lacks background information.
- Do not force your child to read a particular book.
- Do not require that your child read every word of a book.
- Encourage your child to have a question in mind when reading for information.
- Provide practical reading experiences, such as reading directions or a recipe. Ask your child whether the writing could have been improved.

- If your child tends to ramble, occasionally have him stop, identify his main point, and deliver it concisely.

It is important for parents to recognize that decoding is only one of many skills involved in reading. When children struggle with decoding, parents must ensure that comprehension skills are nurtured through other avenues so that the reading difficulty is not compounded. Following the suggestions on this list will help children enjoy reading material and begin on an upward spiral to success.

Biographical Information

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Fran Santoro Hamilton's thirty-five years as teacher, writer, and editor have enabled her to distill the English language to its essentials. Fran is the author of Hands-On English, an English handbook that makes grammar visual, and she cosponsors The Grannie Annie Family Story Celebration. Fran provides many free resources at www.GrammarAndMore.com.