

# Helping Your Child Become a Better Reader

## 1. Let your child lead the way.

Make book selection very personal to your child's reading identity. Celebrate her passions and curiosities by selecting read-alouds about subjects, places, and people that she is wondering about or passionate about. Empower your child to try new genres and to learn more about a lifelong interest to become a true expert. Join with your child to "curate" a personalized reading basket, or create a file online to store favorite titles. Label the basket or file with your child's name. Celebrate as your child becomes connected to favorite authors and create baskets and files to build knowledge about these authors.

## 2. Make talk count.

Be a "close listener" and ask your child to share his opinions, wonderings, and feelings about the books you read aloud together. Ask open-ended questions such as: "What do you think will happen next?" "Why do you think the character did that?" "What is your opinion?" "How do you feel about what that character just said?" "What more do you want to know about this topic?" You can also talk about the illustrations of a book; invite conversation, and wonderings about what your child is noticing about them.

Welcome things that your child does *not* like in a book, so he can express why. He can also choose to stop reading a book all together if he really doesn't like it. Super readers have strong perspectives about what they are reading and this is something to truly celebrate.

## 3. Make reading portable.

Read aloud together beyond bedtime. Take a pack of books on car rides or subway and bus commutes. Listen to audio recordings of great books. Pack a "LitKit" for a long trip, complete with a favorite book pack, earphones you specially reserve as your child's "read aloud" earphones, and a little notebook or digital tablet for your child to record observations and make lists about what she is reading to share with you or other family members. Bring extended family together by doing a Skype or hangout online to welcome grandparents to a read aloud.

## 4. Celebrate mini-milestones.

Make your family's reading experience a celebration. Track the minutes and types of readings you do together and celebrate when you reach goals ("We did 100 minutes of read alouds!"). Hang a chart on the refrigerator and as a "team" try to fill the card by reading aloud from lots of different genres together, filling in your accomplishments: poems, nonfiction articles, short stories, chapter books, comics, and more. When your child starts to recognize names of authors and asks for more books by the same author; when your child requests a read aloud at multiple times in a day; when your child reads independently for two minutes longer than ever before; when your child reads aloud to a younger member of the family. By affirming these mini-milestones, you create a family culture of loving, supporting and giving.

## 5. Read together to reveal the mirrors and windows of life.

When I read *Little Women* with my daughters, we talked about which sister was a mirror for us. We each had a different feeling on how one sister resonated the most with us. Katie was writerly Jo; Charlotte saw herself in mischievous Amy. This led us to many interesting conversations about identity and why a particular character resonates deeply.

In another way, reading together as a family also helps us journey the world and others' experiences while talking about and processing those experiences. When we wondered about what it was like to live on a little island, we read the book *My Island* by Frene Lessac. When we wanted to know how to face the biggest challenges with courage, we read the book *Wonder* by RJ Palacio. When we wanted to understand the dynamic Harlem Renaissance and the power of the creative spirit, we read Langston Hughes. We opened windows to the lives of others and the breath we took to live the air they breathed made us strong and more empathetic too. Make sure the books in your home reflect the great diversity in the souls of your children and in all the world around them and that you invite them to discover their mirrors and windows, and yours too. Where do they find themselves in the books they read? And where do they discover something new?

- When children are young and parents read to them, it piques their interest in reading. It is also fun to have the children make up stories regarding pictures in children's books. As children get older, reading aloud to family members helps them to become stronger readers.
- Families who participate in family reading time have stronger bonds than those that don't.
- Children who read during family reading time are proven to have higher grades in school. They also exhibit higher self-confidence than children who don't have quality family time together.
- **It is one more way to pursue and build relationships with your children as they become young adults.**
  - Expose your child to new words, thereby increasing her vocabulary
  - Sharing books will expand your very young child's growing vocabulary
  - Reading together is a way to spend time with older kids and teens.

## @ your library

- Get a free library card. A library card is your ticket to a world of resources for education and entertainment for the whole family: books, e-books and e-readers, digital audio books, movies, magazines, games, and many other traditional and digital resources.
- Read your school's or school library's newsletter to learn about special programs and family literacy activities at the school library.
- Attend storytime or sing-along class. Many libraries offer weekly programs for parents and caregivers and their babies, toddlers and kids.
- Nearly every state has a "children's choice" book award targeted to the reading and interest levels of a specific range of grades. Your school librarian can connect you with these lists. Encourage your child to participate or, better yet, read the selections together.
- Ask your school librarian for book lists appropriate for your child's reading and interest level and curriculum of your school.
- Anytime is a good time to read, but summer is an important time to keep it up. Participating in a library summer reading program can make the difference between summer setback and

summer success, leading to better academic performance when kids and teens return to school in the fall. Plus, libraries make summer reading fun, with incentives, arts and crafts and special events designed to enhance the reading experience.

- Pick out books together. Try out award-winning books from the Association for Library Service to Children, like Newbery Medal and Caldecott Medal winners and other notable children's books and media. Visit [www.ala.org/alsc](http://www.ala.org/alsc) and click on "Parents" to find lists and other resources for parents and caregivers.
- Thousands of books are published each year for teens. Go online and check out the Young Adult Library Services Association's lists of award-winning books and other recommended reading to help explore new genres and discover new authors. Visit [www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists).
- Every fall, Teen Read Week™, sponsored by the Young Adult Library Services Association, encourages teens to read for the fun of it. Check out your library for special programming during the week.
- Encourage your teen to join a library book club. Book clubs are a great way for teens to get together outside of class and talk about the books they want to read for fun. Comics clubs for teens at the library are similar to book clubs and can focus on popular media like comic books, graphic novels, manga (Japanese print comics) and anime (Japanese animation).

## At home and in the community

- Be a role model. Let your kids see you reading just for the fun of it. Bring a book, e-reader or magazine everywhere. Talk with your kids and teens about what you are reading.
- Read to your kids, starting at birth. Being read to and hearing nursery rhymes — in any language — teaches a baby about emotions and expression. For tips on fostering a love of reading, visit the Association for Library Services to Children's website at [www.ala.org/alsc](http://www.ala.org/alsc). Click on "Parents" then "Born to Read."
- Reading doesn't have to stop when you're on the go. Check out audiobooks of family-friendly titles or movies for your next road trip. Check out Odyssey Award winners, honored as the best audiobooks produced for children and/or young adults, or look for children's videos that have won the Carnegie Medal for excellence in children's video. Visit [www.ala.org/alsc](http://www.ala.org/alsc) and click on "Awards and Grants," then "Book and Media Awards" in the left navigation.
- Schedule family reading time
- It takes 21 days to form a new habit, and like everything else in life, you need to schedule it to make it happen! Mark it on your family's calendar and carve out time after dinner or before bedtime for reading. Create a cozy nook for your family and keep books, board games, puppets and blankets there. A dedicated space will serve as a reminder of the importance of reading and your special time together.
- Have a laugh
- Family reading is about sharing a laugh together! Reading doesn't have to be a serious activity. Choose silly books and let your child select books that crack them up. Use a funny voice when you read and pause at funny parts to laugh. Laughing is infectious and if your child sees you laughing, they will too! Plus, it creates a positive experience that they will remember and look forward to.
- Encourage your child to guess what will happen next. Act out parts of the story and come up with unique voices for all the different characters. Make it fun: if it's your turn to read aloud, you get to select the book!
- Discover something new

- Let your child explore his or her interests through books and share them with your family. Books are a window into a person's inner world and a great way to learn more about each other. Someone's birthday coming up? Why not learn how to bake a cake by reading a recipe together! Use your family reading time to learn about other parts of the world and experiences of families that are different from yours. Share stories and words in different languages and explore new ones.
- Benefits of reading with children every day: | Reading together builds stronger relationships. As children grow more independent, having a positive routine together will allow parents and children to slow down and connect with each other. A child that has a strong relationship with at least one adult is more likely to feel safe and confident, do better in school, and lead a healthy and happy adult life. | Reading together improves communication skills. The contact children get with parents while reading allows children to feel more comfortable expressing their own feelings. This can help children communicate in healthy, productive ways. | Reading together promotes concentration and memory retention. Reading aloud together, even after children learn to read alone, encourages children to concentrate on the story to remember what was read. These skills will serve children well both in and out of school. | Reading together encourages children to think critically. As parents and children talk together about the characters' actions and the plots of stories they are reading, children are learning how to apply logic and good judgment to their own lives.
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- Two concepts will make this family reading celebration successful: | Modeling storytelling for parents and introducing families to simple storytelling strategies allows them to use these tools to build literacy at home. Be sure to model reading books aloud during this event. | Intentional Dialogue emphasizes conversation while reading aloud. Stop to ask questions to deepen children's understanding, check their comprehension, introduce new vocabulary, or make connections from the book to their lives.
- Don't make reading work. Your child may already be under pressure to learn to read at school.
- Reading at home should be beautiful, fun, curiosity-quenching and inspiring. It's great if you can help support your child while learning to read, but your most important job is more profound: to foster a love of reading. Don't put it on yourself to make your child hit particular targets.