

BUILDING READERS®

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Merwin Elementary School

Refresh your family reading routine at the beginning of the school year

There have been a lot of changes and disruptions this past year due to the pandemic. But one thing families can always count on is the power of reading.

Reading with your child every day is one of the best ways to improve his reading skills. To make reading an even bigger part of your daily lives, try these ideas:

- **Mix it up.** You don't have to wait for bedtime to read together. Read books any time—even in the morning at the breakfast table.
- **Celebrate what you read.** Hang a paper “reading tree” on the wall and add a leaf for each book your family reads. Plan a special dinner around a book's theme.
- **Explore library websites.** Together, look for ebooks related to your child's interests, read reviews and make a list of titles to check out.



Turn your child into a book critic

When your child finishes a new book, encourage her to continue thinking about it by writing a short review. She can keep her reviews in a “book review” notebook. Make sure she includes the name of each book and its author.

In a review, your child should answer questions such as:

- **What did I like about this book?**
- **What do I wish were different?**
- **Would I recommend this book** to one of my friends?

Why or why not?

Expressing her thoughts about books will give your child practice writing. It may also motivate her to read more, think about what she's reading and develop important critical thinking skills.

Teach your child textbook reading strategies

If your child has just started using a textbook for school, have her try these strategies:



- **Rewrite headings** into questions. Answering those questions can help your child review what she's read.
- **Pay attention to words in bold type.** This indicates that they're important.
- **Look at the images,** such as graphs and pictures.
- **Answer the questions** at the end of the chapter to check comprehension.

Create a cozy reading nook

Help your child create a special place at home for reading. You don't need a lot of space—just be sure to include:



- **A shelf or basket** filled with a variety of appealing reading material.
- **Comfortable surroundings.** Consider a soft chair or a pile of pillows. Don't forget good lighting!

Music enhances reading skills

Language skills grow when children sing along to their favorite tunes. And rhyming patterns in songs can help boost memory skills, too. To use music to build reading skills:

- **Read the lyrics** as you and your child listen to a song.
- **Talk about word endings** that make up rhymes.
- **Listen to music** (and sing along) in the car and while you do chores at home.



Overcome reading challenges with perseverance and a positive outlook

Reading is part of many home and academic activities, so if your child struggles with reading, it can feel as if it affects every part of his life.

To help your child with reading difficulties:

- **Consult experts, including his teacher.** Ask about realistic expectations. Is your child reading at grade level? If not, what resources are available?
- **Use reading materials at home** that minimize frustration. For example, choose books that are easy to read and understand. They should have very few difficult words.
- **Stay positive about his learning.** Focus on how his strengths in other areas can help him with reading. Praise your child for his hard work.



Make comprehension a key reading goal

To succeed in school, your child must understand the texts she reads. Here are a few simple ways to boost her comprehension:

- **Remind your child** to sound out tough words. Review common words so she can recognize them instantly.
- **Build your child's vocabulary.** Introduce new words through experiences, instruction and reading itself.
- **Ask questions** to get your child thinking about how the information relates to what she already knows.
- **Encourage your child** to think about what she reads. She can also make predictions about what will happen next or summarize a section she has read.



Q: No matter how much I try, my elementary schooler just doesn't like to read. What can I do to encourage him?

A: When children are still learning to read during the early grades, they can become frustrated. Rather than pushing your child to continually practice reading, focus on making reading fun!

Keep interesting reading material on hand. Read in new places, such as under a table. Don't use reading as a punishment. Soon enough, he may just be interested in picking up a book on his own.

Have your child write letters

It's important to stay connected to friends and family—especially in times of social distancing.



Encourage your child to write and mail letters to friends and distant family members. Remind her to ask for a reply. Not only will she get mail, she'll also be developing reading skills.

For lower elementary readers:

- **Coronavirus: A Book for Children** by Kate Wilson, Elizabeth Jenner and Nia Roberts (Nosy Crow). Learn the facts about the coronavirus in this kid-friendly picture book.



- **The Invisible String** by Patrice Karst (Devorss & Co.). Help children overcome loneliness, separation and loss with this simple story about the unbreakable connections of loved ones.

For upper elementary readers:

- **Fish in a Tree** by Lynda Mullaly Hunt (Nancy Paulsen Books). This is an inspiring story about a girl who struggles with dyslexia.
- **Stanley Will Probably Be Fine** by Sally J. Pla (HarperCollins). Stanley finds a way to overcome his anxiety and conquer his fears in this award-winning book about bravery.

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