

How to turn any child into a better reader

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

Reading is the most important tool that children need to achieve academic success and advance in the workplace later in life. But when kids struggle with this skill they can fall behind and develop a permanent antipathy toward reading and books.

What many parents don't realize is there are many simple ways to help improve virtually any child's reading ability.

Studies show that parents with high involvement in their children's learning have kids with higher grades and scores, according to the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL).

"Parents play a critical role in making literacy a daily habit for the family," says Sharon Darling, president and founder of the NCFL. "Many of the things you do with your children as you work, play, read and talk together have an impact on the skills needed to become a confident and competent student."

Here are some easy ways to make any child a better reader:

—Be a role model. Read newspapers, books, magazines and information on the Internet. Let your child see you reading. Share articles from newspapers or magazines. Look for items of interest to your child—those about his school, favorite sports team, movie star or band, or special hobby.

—Make your home reflect the importance of reading. Keep books around. You don't have to own them all; library books work just as well. Ask your child to read you ingredients from your recipe card as you prepare dinner. Have kids look up a phone number in the phone book for you or read the cereal box and tell you how much sodium is in your breakfast cereal.

—Allow your child to choose what she wants to read (within reason, of course). Reading teen idol, fashion and hair style magazines can lead to reading biographies or the style section of newspapers.

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—Make literacy and reading portable. As you drive across town look for signs with words beginning with the same letter as your young child's name.

—Create reading rituals and get close. Read together daily, starting when your child is a baby. Set aside a special time and place to read. Get close. When you cuddle with your children while reading, they associate reading with a sense of security. Children learn better when they feel safe.

—Provide sound effects. Use silly voices and sounds to keep your child interested. Hearing different sounds in language also helps your child develop critical listening skills. Try singing, too!

—When reading a story, pause to talk to your child about it. Ask open-ended questions, like "What do you think will happen next?" or "What would you do?"

—Read it again. Children need to hear favorite stories repeated. This helps them recognize and remember words. Most importantly, as kids become familiar with a story, it gives them confidence about reading and improves their comprehension.

—Keep it active. Let your child touch and hold the book. Ask her to turn the pages. And you don't always have to sit when you read or listen to a story. Try clapping out a fun rhyme or dancing to a silly poem.

For more tips visit www.famlit.org.

"Above all, follow your child's pace. Choose books suited to his or her age and development," says Darling.