

What to do when child has trouble reading

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

When children struggle at reading, not only does schoolwork suffer, studies point to long term consequences—from being left back in school to having trouble at work and earning less than peers.

It's important for parents to recognize early when kids are having difficulty reading and to help improve this skill, according to specialists at the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL).

Here are some tips for parents of struggling readers, from the NCFL, just in time for National Family Literacy Day this Nov. 1:

—Seek help immediately. Parents often wait too long. The window of greatest opportunity for helping a struggling reader is in the early years. Children should be reading pretty well by the end of third grade. Check with your child's teacher to learn how to help.

—Reading is a skill that gets better with practice. Make reading fun. It is not all about drill.

—Encourage reading everywhere! Have children read street signs and T-shirts. Get them to help with cooking; reading recipes, labels and shopping lists. Have children keep track of family activities on a calendar.

—Give children choices in what they read. Magazines are appealing. They have short articles with colorful pictures. Poems are another great way to motivate. They are short and give the child a sense of accomplishment when read.

—Set reading goals. Reward reading with incentives of importance to children. Learn what interests them and connect that to reading. Is there a museum near home that would be of interest? Read about famous athletes in a favorite sport or a favorite movie.

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—Read everyday as a family. Make learning new words fun. The more words a reader knows, the more he comprehends what he reads or hears. Have conversations about interesting words. Give children a “kid-friendly” definition and then use the word in conversation.

—Help children write a letter to a grandparent, family friend or pen pal.

—Show children reading is important in your life. Be sure they see you enjoying reading for pleasure.

For more tips, visit famlit.org/families.

Above all, families can get kids on the right track. Byron Pitts, contributor to “60 Minutes” and chief national correspondent for CBS News, knows this well. When he was growing up he hid the fact he could barely read.

“In elementary school a therapist determined I was functionally illiterate,” says Pitts, whose new book, “Step Out On Nothing,” chronicles his battle with illiteracy. “I had to start with the basics, relearning the alphabet around the age of 11. It was a time of great shame in my life.”

Family can make the difference, he stresses.

“There was no single greater force or advocate in my journey to literacy than my mother,” he says. “Her encouraging words drowned out those who said I was ‘slow’ or ‘stupid.’ There may be no greater force in a child’s life than their mother or father.”