Five Strategies Make Reading More Exciting for Your Children

Strong reading skills help in every school subject. But experts say that to build reading abilities, children must want to read. And unfortunately, many children just aren’t interested.

Parents can help by showing kids that reading is fun and rewarding. Here are five ways to do just that:

**Listen to audio books.** This is a great way to show a reluctant reader how interesting books can be. Young children may enjoy recordings made by parents. They can follow along with the book while listening.

**Sign up to correspond** with a pen pal. Kids love receiving mail and learning about life in other countries. Ask your child’s teacher or a librarian about how to get involved.

**Take a field trip.** Challenge your children to research attractions in your area, such as museums and parks. Then ask them to be your “tour guide” as they share with you what they have learned.

**Follow current events.** Is there a developing news story that interests your child? Read the latest reports in the paper or online together each night.

**Make “reading coupons.”** Show your children that you think reading is special by giving them reading coupons. Some might be for 30 minutes of reading with you. Others might be good for a trip to the bookstore or an extra trip to the library to select a book. Reading coupons also make great rewards for good behavior.

Improve Your Children’s Learning by Giving Their Social Skills a Boost

One of the best indicators of children’s future school success is their ability to interact with others. Students with positive social skills tend to do better in school. Students who are aggressive are disliked by classmates or are unable to form close relationships.

Class discussions, group projects and group activities all require students to work with one another. Without strong social skills, it will be difficult for your child to succeed in school and in life.

To reinforce social skills at home:

**Talk about what it takes** to be a good friend—being honest, nice and a good listener. Can your children think of times when they’ve been shown these traits? Role-play with your children to help them practice being friendly.

**Teach your children** to be a good sport. Encourage them to be gracious whether they win or lose. Compliment them for trying hard, even when they don’t succeed.

**Expect your children to be kind** and polite. Being nice is the right thing to do. Help them think about others’ feelings: “Beth’s mom is sick. How do you think we could help?”

**Practice cooperation.** Do projects together, such as planning a family dinner. Look for opportunities to compromise. (“You can sleep 10 minutes later before school if you choose your outfits at night.”)

**Support your children’s friendships.** Allow them to invite friends over and participate in group activities. Also encourage them to meet new people.

**Be a role model.** When parents are friendly to each other, kids probably will be, too.
Q & A

Q: My child reads the chapter before test time—but can’t always recall the facts! How can I help my child improve?

A: There are many memorization tricks that may help your child remember facts. Here are a few:

Acronyms. Your child can make a word out of the first letter of terms to be memorized, such as HOMES for the Great Lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior).

Sentences. Help your child use the first letter of each word to make a silly sentence, such as “My very educated mother just served us noodles” for the planets in order of their distance from the sun: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune.

Grouping. Have your child study similar things together. Instead of memorizing the capitals of every state or province in the country, have your child divide them into geographic regions and memorize each region.

Recitation. Have your child repeat facts out loud and focus on the meaning of what your child is saying.

Rhymes. Think of rhymes about facts, such as “In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.”

Images. Your child can draw or imagine a picture of what is being studied. Your child can recall that image during the test.

Personalization. Have your child make personal connections to information. A relative’s birthday might also be an important date in history.

Singing. Your child can replace words in a familiar song with facts that need to be remembered.

Homework Habits Create Long-term School Success

Imagine your children as high school students with hours of homework every day. How would they handle it? Help them prepare now by instilling basic homework habits. The habits your children develop in elementary school will last a lifetime!

To set your children up for success:

Enforce a study time. Choose one that works best for your child. Some kids need to blow off steam right after school, while others like to finish homework right away. Pick the time that works best for your children—and stick with it!

Create a study space. Make sure your children have a quiet and comfortable place to work. It should be free of distractions, especially noise from the TV. Stay nearby to supervise.

Encourage them to finish early. Long-term assignments are perfect opportunities to teach your children the value of planning. If they have to write book reports, for example, split the project into parts and set a deadline for each one. Ideally, they should finish with time to spare.

Compliment success. Talk with your children about how great it feels to work hard and see results. Offer positive feedback, such as, “You worked hard on your project and it shows!” “You earned an A on the test because you studied every day.” “Doesn’t it feel great to be finished? Now we can go do something fun!”