

Helping your child learn to read.

A Guide for Parents



A conversation with Sandra Fox (Oglala Lakota)

Probably the most important thing children learn in school is how to read. We have put together some things you can do at home to help your children become better readers. These include things that parents can do to motivate their children to read. Right now, schools are spending a lot of time teaching phonics, teaching students how to sound out words and that is important. They are not spending a lot of time getting the students to want to read.

Some of the things you can do to get your children to read, is to read yourself. If you have the habit of reading, they will see that reading is important. If you have magazines and newspapers, novels, and other reading materials in your home, they will see that reading is an important thing to do. The second thing you can do is buy books for them, for their birthdays, Christmas, just when you go to the store and see a book they might be interested in.

The third thing you can do is read to them, that is very important.

The fourth thing is to have them read to you. If you are interested in what they are doing in school

and what they are bring home, they will want to read more. These are the most important things you can do.

One way to define phonics is the matching of words to sounds. Children learn the names of the letters and the sounds they make. They learn the sounds that two letters together make. Children have to learn phonics, but the standardized tests students take have so much on phonics, teachers sometimes neglect to spend time reading to them and having them read stories of interest to them.

There is a lot of good Indian literature out there, books by Indian authors and about topics in Indian culture and tradition. There are also many books on topics that children find interesting: animals, sports, science

Research shows that reading to your children is the number one thing you can do to help your children to love to read. When you sit next them, and have that nice parent-child or grandparent-child relationship, you are not creating a bond with the children, but a bond with the book and with reading. This has the effect of the children learning about reading: that the pages go left to right, the words go from left to right, the letters make words, and the pictures go with the words.

You should read to your children every day, and it is important to read the same book over and over so that they recognize the story and feel so comfortable with that book that they can “read” it themselves. They aren’t reading it, but they know the story so well they have memorized it. This gives them the confidence to continue to read. This book becomes a building block that leads to a love of reading.

It doesn’t have to be a parent or grandparent reading to children, it can also be an older child, brother or sister, just someone who knows how to read.

Sometimes children are turned off to reading; they just don’t like reading for whatever reason, they are a reluctant reader. You can still do all the same things you would do to help a child learn to read.

You can also find out specifically what your child’s interests are and buy those books. Bring home several of the books on that topic. For example, if your child is interested in horses, have a number of books on horses available for your child to read. If the child is interested in basketball, have books and magazines about basketball.

The second thing is to make word lists of all the words associated with the topic that your child is interested in. The child may use the words all the time because they are interested in that topic. but

may not have seen those words written down. The child will see how the words are spelled and how the letters are sounded out. The child should keep the list, perhaps on a bulleting board in their room. The third thing is to read to them about the specific topic in which they are interested.

The fourth thing is to find information on the Internet or articles in newspapers and magazines about the topic and point those out to your child so they can read them. Read it yourself so you can share it and discuss it with your child.

As a parent, you provide the materials of interest for your child, and if their interests change, you bring in new materials.

Sometimes students are so into sounding out words that they do not comprehend the meaning of the passage they are reading. You need to know if your child understands what they are reading, in addition to sounding out the words. Something you can do is have them read to you a short passage from a school assignment or a book they have at home. After they have read it, ask them to retell the story to you, tell you what the story was about or what happened in the story. It is really important to know that your child understands the words, not just that they can sound out the words. If they cannot tell you what was happening in the story, you will have to continue to ask them to retell so that they know it is important to understand and remember the story.

By short passage we mean the length of a reading that your child would do for a school assignment, or something from a book they have already been reading, at least a half a page. That will be enough to know if your child has understanding. Even students who appear to be good readers because they can use phonics to “read” the words should be regularly asked to retell the story to be sure they understand what they are reading.

If your child is not a reader, you can also check for understanding by reading the story to them, and asking them to retell the story. Your child can also draw a picture of what they understood about the story.

There are new strategies that work with students to help understanding, whether the reading is a school subject or something students are reading for pleasure. These strategies came from a study in Denver for beginning readers and are based on what good readers do when they are reading, and after they have read something.

When many parents were in school, one way to check understanding was to state the main idea of a passage. Boring!! Abstract! No fun! The eight new strategies are more engaging to students and emphasize that students have thoughts and feelings. One strategy is to have children draw a picture of the story.

. Another is to have children explain what they felt about the characters when they read the story.

A third strategy is to have the child connect the story to something in their own lives or another situation with a friend, or even another story they have read.

You can also have your child come up with their own questions about the story. These four strategies are simple yet powerful ways to have your children remember the story. The strategies would be used only one at a time, so that students are not turned off by too much “work” associated with reading. A parent who uses these strategies on a regular basis will see their children become better readers who enjoy reading more.

Additional strategies include having your child summarize the story-not just retelling, but telling the whole story using fewer words. Summarizing is an important skill that will be useful, even into college.

Another is to have your child tell you the part of the story or passage that they liked the best. Everyone learns to love reading by having passages that they like best. There is no right answer, just that their idea is important. It’s a way of empowering a child to be a critic of literature.

Another strategy is learning vocabulary. A parent can ask about “new” words or “cool” words in the story. Children need to be interested about new words, perhaps a “word of the day”. Reading is actually a way to have students interested in learning new words.

A final strategy is to extend the story. What can your child do next? After reading the book about horses, your family could visit a farm with horses and maybe even ride a horse. Your child can be the researcher, coming up with the ideas, going to a museum, a movie related to the book, or reading another book.