

How to encourage your children to read more books

Ten great ways to develop your children's desire to read book

By Chris Barnardo

Reading is great for both you and your children and is a fantastic form of relaxation and escapism. Reading books helps your children develop their language skill, extend their vocabulary and their understanding of the world. Your children's spelling and writing skills are also improved by regular reading.

Reading can be especially helpful to your children when they are going through difficult times in their lives, such as the separation of parents,

starting a new school, the death of a loved one, bullying, or puberty. A good book gives them a mental place to go where the day to day worries aren't so ever present, it gives them new people to meet and gets them involved in other people's stories. Reading develops your children's creativity. It's better than the television, because when children get involved in the book they are reading, they imagine the characters and scenes, which paint all kinds of

wonderful images in their minds, in a far more interactive and satisfying way than television can ever do. reading encourages your child to be creative and think for themselves.

So, everyone knows how good reading is for their children, but how do you encourage them to read, or read more. Here are ten top tips to get you started and get your children reading books.

Fill your house with books and give your kids their own bookshelf

This is especially important if they don't live with you, because any way you can make your place feel like their home, is good, and having their own favourite books in a special place is perfect.

Read to your children

Set up a routine of a bedtime story or chapter from their book. Bedtime reading is a great routine to get into because it is a perfect relaxing bridge between the excitement of the day and sleep. It is also a special time for you to be together without the stresses and hassles of the day, a time when all is clam and you are just having fun together.

However, don't restrict yourself to bedtimes, read to them whenever the opportunity presents itself. Read them funny or interesting stories from the newspaper when you spot them, save and read out a funny or moving poem before you eat a meal together; get them to read their homework out loud to you when they have done it.

Listen to audio books in the car on longer journeys

Audio books make every long journey an adventure in itself. If the story is good and the narration is well done, the journey will flash by and when you reach your destination you may even find yourselves wanting to stay in the car to hear the end of the story. They can be expensive, but most stories will bear repeated listening and the library lend out audio books for free.

Don't be a book snob

Children are inspired to read by all kinds of different books, graphic novels, magazines, web blogs, manuals, science fiction, or teenage romance for example. Let them get interested in reading in whatever form that takes to start with, once they get into the habit of reading this will expand to take in a wider and wider choice of material over time as their friends introduce them to new books and ideas.

Talk though the story when you read it

Chat about the characters in the story. If it is a novel then talking about the main character's motivations, asking what your children think the characters are going to do next, or what is going to happen in the story, all add weight to the experience of reading. Ask questions about the writer's style, or the way the writer describes the scenes will help your children get the most out of the story and will help them in a very subtle (but powerful) way with their own written schoolwork and homework assignments. Discussing stories and listening to what your children have to say about the characters and the situations they encounter in the book will tell you a lot about what your child is thinking, and help you understand them better.

At weekends or on holidays make a treat of getting magazines

Magazines have short articles about things they like, horses, cars, fashion, gossip, TV soaps, toys, console games, and popular science for example. If they really like a particular magazine then consider buying a subscription to it for them as a birthday (or other special occasion) present.

Give books as gifts

Take the trouble to go to the bookshop at the weekend or browse the second hand book shop for interesting titles and involve your children in choosing the best book as a gift. When giving a book, especially to your children, always write their name and the date and a short message in the book inside the cover or on the flyleaf. Then they'll always know it's theirs and know that you think that it is a precious gift that you have chosen specially for them.

Get a poetry book and occasionally read them a poem

Poems are fabulous for evoking emotions and feelings. The best poems condense and capture descriptions of scenes or feelings in a very powerful way, bridging the gap between stories and songs. Inspire your children with poems and they will remember lines from them, and the times you read to them, for the rest of their lives.

Choose material that they like

There is plenty of time to discover the classics. To start with choose books that you know your children will like. Choose different books to read to them than those which they are going to read to themselves. When you read to them, you can pick books with exciting or thrilling stories that may have longer words in then they would be able to read themselves. (Always explain a word or phrase if you think that they don't understand it). Perhaps you have seen a film that you all liked, get the book that inspired the film and read that. If they are reading to themselves, a graphic novel or even a comic is an excellent way to start reading around a film story.

Have a word of the day

Reading is as much about exploring language and the way stories are told as it is about the stories themselves. Look on the web or in a dictionary and pick a word of the day which you can all learn together. The word you choose can be gross or exciting, different or funny, long or strange but above all make sure that it is useful in some way. Get everyone to make up a sentence with the new word in it and give a point or star for the best sentence. If they want, let your children each find and tell their favourite new word of the day. A good time to do this is at meal times when you are all together.

For some ideas on a few good books that your children might like, have a look at dadcando's what we like this week column or dadcando's recommended "Superb kid's books" on dadcando's "Be Inspired, be inspiring" pages.