

Twenty Ways to Help Children Improve Reading Fluency and Skills

Here are some ideas and tips to help you support your young reader at home.

1. Continue to read aloud to your children. Even when they can read by themselves, it is important for them to hear a more fluent reader read. You can share reading time with your children by taking turns reading parts out loud or by participating in choral readings where you read together.
2. If you have older children, encourage them to read with and to help your younger children with reading. You learn best when you have to teach someone else. If your children are only children or around the same age, try to have them volunteer in programs where they read with younger children.
3. Instruct children about how texts are put together. Show them how some books go from beginning to end, while others start in the middle. Talk to them about titles, headings, pictures, etc. and what you can learn from these. Point out clues in reading like things that are repeated, things in bold or italics, etc. Explain the difference between non-fiction and fiction, figurative language (poetic language) and literal language (“plain” English). Encourage your children to read a variety of things- non-fiction, short stories, poems, articles, etc. so that they understand about different genres.
4. Help children to generate questions about what they have read. These questions should deal with the what, how, and why of the things they have read. Children should know the purpose of the story or article, the main characters or whose point of view it is, the action, and how the author goes about putting everything together. In addition, they should ask can I trust what I have read- why or why not?
5. Assist children in using clues from what they have read to predict what might happen next in a story or to make an inferences about what might happen next in a story or to make an inference about something an author hints at but doesn’t say in an article. Teach your children about how authors make choices about what to include in what they write.
6. Discuss what your children have read with them. Don’t simply focus on comprehension questions; in addition, ask their feelings about what they read, what stood out to them and why, what they liked and didn’t like, and if the text reminds them of something else.
7. Encourage your child to write in response to reading. They can keep a journal of reading responses with thoughts about the reading including what they learned, what they liked or didn’t like, and what happened in what they read. They can also include any unanswered questions after reading.

- 8.** Have your children read out loud to you. If they make errors, do not correct them as they are reading and let small errors go. Repeated errors or errors that can affect comprehension should be corrected by bringing the child back to the mistake and asking him or her to read it again. If the same error is made, review what it was and discuss the mistake with the child. If the child corrects him or herself, the reading should continue on from there. Whenever you are unsure of whether your child has made a fatal error, do not correct him or her. (A fatal error would be reading the wrong word for a key word but not reversing something like of and for unless this is done repeatedly).
- 9.** Model good reading for your children. Share what you read with them or read what they are reading. Talk to them about the things you find important in what you read and why. Show them how you form opinions about reading and how you use clues in the text to help guide comprehension. In addition, explain the connections you can make with a text and the criticisms (good and bad) that you might have about it. Share the questions that you generate about a text as well.
- 10.** Read yourself> Children will imitate you and will be more likely to read and read well in a house filled with all types of interesting books. Also, show your children how reading a lot of materials can help with the background knowledge to understand new ideas.
- 11.** Create a special reading area for your children. Let them make decisions about how it should be decorated and what should be contained there.
- 12.** Increase children's vocabulary by playing word games like "Wheel of Fortune", Scrabble, Boggle, or Mad Libs. A family game night is the perfect way to find ways to increase a child's word power.
- 13.** If your school does not provide them, create reading lists for your children. Have a celebration of some sort or an incentive built in when your child finishes a part or all of the list. Do not just leave the child to read the books, though, structure questions, conversations, and activities into the reading lists.
- 14.** Incorporate reading into your everyday life. Show your children and share with them what you read during the day. Also, use any opportunity for reading: an outing, learning about an illness, learning about an activity or pet, etc. Complete the reading beforehand then discuss the event and the reading afterwards.
- 15.** Try not to criticize your child's reading choices. If they love comic books, get a book about illustration or about the illustrator of their favorite comic strip. Whenever possible, use their interests to guide their reading choices and give them some power in making decisions about what to read.
- 16.** Use a child's love of television or movies to your advantage. Pair books and related movies together then have your child compare and contrast the two.

- 17.** Remember that reading on a computer is also reading. Select good reading sites from the internet that you and your child can participate in. In addition, use books on tape if your kids like to listen.
- 18.** For reluctant or non-readers, choose books that deal with issues that affect them in their lives. Be careful to ensure that the books are current and are directed to your child's age group.
- 19.** Offer praise whenever your child reads. Do so in a realistic fashion and in a way that your child will appreciate it. You can use special certificates or reading hugs, as appropriate.
- 20.** Encourage your child to analyze and to critically think about what he or she reads. One way to do this is to have the child identify the purpose, audience and voice of the piece. Use two pieces of writing about the same topic, but which have a different purpose, audience, or voice to show how two pieces of writing can be very different based upon what the author thinks the reader needs or wants to hear. You can also use two different types of writing with the same theme – for example a short story and a poem about love – then have your child compare and contrast them.