

A caution is necessary here. There is research that shows that under some conditions reading to children at an early age can produce the “Broccoli Effect”, that is, children who are turned off reading. This happens when parents feel

obligated to read to the child and do it grudgingly and without joy. When a child senses that it is a chore for the parent to read to him or her, more damage is done than good. Select a time to read to your child when you’re not tired or busy, and make this a fun time for both your child and for you. I should add here that it is important for children, especially for boys, to see and hear men reading. In the past decades test results have shown that boys are falling behind girls in reading. Part of the problem is thought to be a lack of male models in this area. In today’s world it may not be easy to find the time to get that quality hour for reading to and with children, but the payoff is too great not to make that effort.

Other things parents and caregivers can do to help children become better learners include:

- Let the child hear much music, all kinds of music, especially classical stuff, even from before birth. You don’t have to play it all day long. A half hour a day isn’t that long, and who knows, you might grow to like it.
- When a child asks questions, give the child reasons for your answer. “The reason I don’t want you to have a glass of juice now, is that it’s dinner time soon.” You aren’t only teaching language, but also cause and effect and more.
- If you chose a daycare for your child, check it out. What kind of environment will the child find? Are the children exposed to good amounts of language? Do they have opportunities to speak frequently? Is the atmosphere a caring one?
- Good nutrition and rest are obviously important to brain function and regular health. Experience has shown that many children arrive at school without eating breakfast, and that they eat junk food during the day.
- Once a child enters school, your job teaching your child isn’t done. Continue with what you have been doing and add these to your list:
- Always show an interest in what your child does in school. When you ask, “What did you learn today?” and the reply is, “Nothing.” Do a little digging. Ask what he or she did in math, in reading and so on, and look at the notebooks.
- Get to know the teachers. Let them know to what your child responds best. What it can do already, what the child’s fears are, and what your expectations are. These are important bits of information for the teacher. Find out how the teacher teaches reading and math.
- But don’t make a pest of yourself. Teachers with a room full of kids are very busy people.
- Once homework is expected, insist on seeing your child’s planner every day and provide a quiet place and a regular time for homework. A break from studies right after school is a good idea for most children.
- If at all possible, volunteer time in the school at least once a week, and don’t quit after grade three.
- Remember attendance is important to learning subject matter and responsibility, but a sick child will not learn much in school. Getting well is best done at home.
- Make a point knowing who your child’s friends are. When your youngster reaches secondary school, pray a lot. Your youngster’s friends may be just as important to him or her for a few years as you are.

A good reading program at school should help your child become a proficient reader. Good reading programs will include specific components. In the primary grades phonics (the relationships between letters and symbols and sounds) should be taught. But this skill isn't an aid for comprehension. It's good to move beyond this skill.

Reading skills and comprehension strategies need to be taught directly. Guided reading practice should happen often. It's also vital that students read mostly at a reading level that is not too difficult and not too easy, called the instructional reading level. Material that is too difficult to read results in students learning to dislike reading. Readers will not progress. Reading "easy stuff" may advance fluency, but will not stretch the reader sufficiently. Today, much of the reading material in elementary schools is leveled. Teachers know what the difficulty level of the material is. A reading program that has all students read from the same book guarantees that 20 to 30% or more students will not progress as they should.

Good reading programs give students opportunities to read a lot. It emphasizes reading fluency, sometimes referred to as automaticity. There is a direct link between fluency and good comprehension. A good reading program allows students to practice a passage before reading it orally. A good reading program is possible when teachers are trained in teaching reading, read often to the students and love to read for pleasure.

Finally, experience has taught that students who are fluent readers by the end of grade six, who read much and love to read, can be predicted to have success in high school studies. These students are made, not born.

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