



Building Blocks for Reading Success

Academic subjects taught by teachers provide the foundation that children need for school success. It is their job. Like teachers we want our children to:

- Be highly motivated learners
- Solve new types of problems
- Come up with original ideas
- Communicate effectively
- Work well in groups
- Analyze, organize and prioritize information
- Read, think critically and draw conclusions from a set of facts and opinions
- Learn new ways of learning

Our job as parents is to **support** their learning in positive ways. You can be his “coach” in developing good learning skills and attitudes for life-long success. These are the things we want to avoid as “coaches”:

- Too involved, bossy or demanding
- Teach something in a different way than the school’s method
- Not admitting that we sometimes do not know
- Discomfort for both child & parent

What we want to do instead is to build a good relationship with our children as partners in the learning process that is productive and enjoyable rather than a struggle.

Here are some tips:

1. Be available.
2. Offer support, not criticism. Find something positive to say before pointing out mistakes. Make your comments honest & sincere. Don’t attack the child personally.
3. Focus on the effort and improvement instead of grades. Have high expectations rather than emphasizing grades. Focusing on grades lowers their motivation. The learning itself is the most important thing.
4. Remember, you don’t have to be an expert. Don’t be afraid to say “I don’t know.”
5. Don’t expect perfection. Your child is still growing & developing! Expect mistakes to be made!
6. Turn the thinking over to the child. Let them solve problems.
7. Enjoy! Our brain learns best when we are excited about what we are learning, when we feel safe & secure and when some enjoyment, humor or novelty is part of the experience.

Parents of children up to age seven have the most responsibility. Our primary task is to build a wide, rich foundation of experience, language, and problem-solving skills. Experiences, challenging projects and activities that engage the child's curiosity help to develop the mental structures required for learning. These will leave children with the right attitudes for school success. The following are the attitudes and feelings they will need to internalize with your help:

- I am lovable.
- I like learning.
- I am good at doing new things. I am capable.
- If something seems hard at first, I can get it by trying.
- Adults will help me if I need it, but leave me to learn something on my own.
- It's fun to play with other kids. I know how to cooperate with them.
- I can't have my way all the time. Sometimes I must listen to adults and do as they say.
- I like to be helpful.

The parental role through the elementary grades changes to those mainly of “coach”, cheering section & planning assistant. The message should be “We believe in you and we are here to keep you safe and help you when you need us.” Children need help in managing the logistics of school life during this time. This means providing them assistance in organizing school supplies and reference sources, planning long-term assignments, managing their time and arranging transportation.

With the above in mind, then we can build a strong reading foundation by following these guidelines:

1. Read aloud to your children or listen together to tapes of good books. Try to establish a regular time for this. Talk about what you are reading – prompt them to make **predictions** (What will happen next?); encourage **analysis** (Why do you think she made that decision; was it a good one?); reinforce memory (Tell me about the events that happened; who, what, where, when and how)
2. Encourage and expand language development by talking and listening to each other. “It is a train running on steel tracks but it is also called a locomotive with a steam engine.”
3. Help them to be analytic thinkers. Ask them for their opinions and the reasons why they think as they do. Listen as they express their ideas and state your own. Give them choices and let them participate in making decisions. They will also benefit in having “quiet time” to think about ideas.
4. Show your children that reading can be fun. Show them that you read and enjoy books, magazines, newspapers, etc. Be a good role model.
5. Ask teachers for help and identify activities you can do with your child.

Specific Strategies for Different Ages

The Beginning Reader

1. Keep the level of pressure low and recognize his anxiety. Don't get impatient and force reading. Some children learn to read by age four and others later. Reassure him that he will learn when he is ready. Keep it fun and interesting.
2. Use picture books. Take turns telling the story from the pictures.
3. Play rhyming games, read children's poems and call attention to rhyming sounds.
4. Practice naming words that start with the same consonant sound – mug, mother, missile, mess.
6. Children learn words better when they see them in context; that is in a sentence that has a personal meaning to them. Flash cards are not the best way to teach your child about reading.
7. It is fine to teach them the alphabet by pointing out different letters on signs – as long as you don't force the issue. When they ask you questions about a word, answer them. Don't panic when your child reverses letters or words. These are natural and will usually sort themselves out.
8. If your home is bilingual, concentrating on one language for beginning reading experiences is probably best. You can still read to your child in both languages.

The Elementary Student

1. Set aside a regular time to read to your child.
2. Make sure that he is reading from books that are easy and enjoyable (independent level). The purpose is to practice fluency and learn to enjoy reading.
3. Let the child choose the books.
4. As the child reads, listen to determine if she understands the meaning. The way she phrases, observes punctuation marks and makes comments about the story are good clues.
5. Insert an occasional question that will challenge her thinking and to which there is no right answer.
6. When the story is finished, ask her to retell it briefly. Help her find the main ideas and important parts and recall them in order. You could also extend discussion of the story by imagining a different ending, a different main character or a different setting.

7. Encourage mental imagery. Practice making “mental movies” of what is happening in the book. Draw pictures of what you each “saw” in the story.
8. Perfection is not the goal. Comprehension is.
9. Encourage habits of independent reading. Children learn to read by reading!

Adapted from *Helping Your Child Succeed in School: A Guide for Parents of 4 to 14 Year Olds*
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