

Raising a Reader by Abby Margolis Newman - Scholastic.com

Teachers build skills, but a parent's top job is to nurture a love of books and words.

What does it mean for a child to be a reader » not just someone who can handle the mechanics of reading but one who craves books like a caffeine addict craves his daily Starbucks? "There is a huge difference between knowing how to read and being an avid reader," says Jim Trelease, author of *The Read-Aloud Handbook*. "We do a good job in schools at teaching kids how to read but we've forgotten to teach them to want to read."

So how do we parents turn our children from novice or even struggling readers into kids (and later, adults) who will consistently turn to reading as a source of pleasure? There are several rules of thumb that the experts agree are building blocks to raising enthusiastic readers.

Rule number 1: It all starts with reading aloud. And reading aloud should start from birth, say the experts. "You cannot overestimate the importance of this," says Betsy Rogers, a first- and second-grade teacher in Birmingham who is Alabama's 2003 Teacher of the Year. The more words your child hears from the beginning of her life, Rogers says, the bigger her vocabulary will be » which will pave the way when she learns to read herself. As Trelease points out, "Listening comprehension comes before reading comprehension."

Many parents make the mistake of no longer reading aloud once their children are able to read to themselves. Trelease argues that you should read aloud to your children well into middle school, using books that are two or three levels above those the kids can read themselves. In other words, if your first-grader is perfectly capable of reading *The Cat in the Hat* by himself, have him read it to you, then read a chapter book to him.

Rule number 2: Have plenty of books in the house. "Books should be integrated into your family's life every day," says Barbara Genco, president of the Association for Library Services to Children. Keep books in the bathroom, on the bedside table, in the backpack. Get your child a library card as soon as she is old enough, then take weekly or bi-weekly trips to the library. If the thought of frequent trips to Barnes & Noble sounds like a budget-buster, visit a used bookstore. However you choose to stock your house with books, doing so sends a strong message to your children that you value reading, which leads to:

Rule number 3: Model reading for your children by being a reader yourself. Make a point of reading a book or the newspaper while your children are in the room. "A child who never hears or sees a parent reading, but only sees that parent watching TV, will emulate that behavior," says Trelease. Too much TV (according to the American Academy of Pediatrics, more than 10 hours a week) leads to underachievement in school. As your child gets older, look for areas of common interest and read together. If your preteen son is an athlete, read the sports section together or get him a subscription to a sports magazine (yes, says Trelease, magazines do count). This, says Genco, "creates a direct connection between what they love to do in life and reading."

Rule number 4: Let your kids be in charge of what they read. Allow your kids to select their own books, even if they're too easy, advises Genco. And it's OK if she wants to read junk once in a while, as long as she's reading a variety of things. Parents who try to exert too much control over the content of their kids' reading risk fueling the perception that reading is a chore. Reading for pleasure, the experts agree, should be the ultimate goal. "If you have a struggling reader, and reading results in tears and arguments, don't force it," says Rogers. "Read to her instead."

Another tactic that can be effective for children who are struggling with reading (or just beginning to get the hang of it): giving small rewards. "For these kids, reading is still work," says Trelease, "and the only way to become a better reader is to do it more." For frustrated or new readers, the intrinsic pleasure in reading just isn't there yet, so it's OK to offer extrinsic rewards, such as movie tickets, TV privileges, or even a dollar or two, in exchange for concentrated reading time. Trelease warns parents to keep it simple:

"Don't go overboard on the incentives, otherwise the reward becomes the goal and not the reading itself," he advises.

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