Let’s Read Together!
How To Become Your Child’s Reading Coach

Practical Tips For Parents and Families

“Respecting The Right of Parents To Make Educational Decisions For Their Children”

The development of this publication was supported by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education through the OSEP-funded State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG).
Literacy: A Key To School and Life Success

What exactly is literacy and how can parents support its development? Literacy is quite simply the ability to read and write.

The National Institutes of Health estimates that one in five children has serious difficulties learning to read...and are at risk for failure in school and in life. (Reading Rockets, WETA, Washington D.C., ©2008.)

Reading is the foundation for a good education. A skill which offers lifelong benefits and pleasure. Unlike language, which comes naturally to children, reading is a complex learned task and can be difficult for some children to learn.

Educators believe that parents, and the reading opportunities they provide for their children, greatly influence a child’s reading development. Parental efforts are viewed as a valuable reading development resource.

Families want their children to succeed in school and in life. They know that learning to read is an important step in a child’s path to success.

Parents also know that reading with children and helping them practice to read is important, but where do they begin? This guide will help you understand that becoming your child’s reading coach is easy.

It’s Easy, Coach . . . Start at the Beginning!

Knowing about books and print and how they are used is called print awareness.

Just imagine, you have never read a book before. What would YOU want to know?

► What is the title of the book? A child needs you to show him where to find the title. Point to the title as you read it. You might say, “The title of this book is ....” After a few times, your child will know where to find the title.

► Who wrote this book and drew the pictures? Talk to your child about the difference between the Writer or Author and the Artist or Illustrator. Show your child where to find each name on the cover of the book.

► What is the “direction” of reading? Does your child know that reading begins at the top left, and continues to the right, moving downward? Pointing to the words as you read aloud will reinforce this concept. When you get to the end of the first line, show your child that you continue reading by going to the next line of text, all the way on the left side of the page. Point with your finger and continue reading.

► How do you know when to stop reading? Explain that a period means STOP. Use an expressive voice to demonstrate other forms of punctuation, like excitement for the Exclamation Point or a questioning tone for the Question Mark.

Keep reading parents to learn more easy coaching tips.

“Children are made readers on the laps of their parents.”
— Emilie Buchwald
Families play an important role in their children’s education, and can become their best teachers.

If you are unsure about what is appropriate and helpful, you can begin by making learning a family priority in your home.

♦ Become Your Child’s Learning Partner. Read, travel (shopping and grocery trips count), and engage your child in conversations. Talking builds vocabulary, comprehension and communication skills. Parents can make learning everyday fun. No special activities or skills are required for relationships and knowledge to grow and prosper.

♦ Make Your Home “Learner-Friendly.” With a little effort, you can make ordinary household items learning tools. Label things like the stove, door or table. Collect the labels and let your child put them back on the correct objects. You don’t have to have a library of children’s books; read cereal boxes, newspapers (comics), and magazines. Are you clipping coupons? Ask your child if she recognizes the product. Find products with the same beginning sound.

♦ Make Learning A Family Event. Whether the learning experiences are structured or casual, almost all family members can be an expert in something. Older siblings can play memory games or read with younger family members. Learn new words and concepts together by reading a book out loud. Family members can become specific book characters. Play word games like “I spy”. Spice up “movie night” with a little family acting. Guess the beginning letter of your child’s favorite movie character.

♦ Encourage Your Child to Talk and Ask Questions. Let your child hear new words in natural conversation. Take time to explain new words. For example, you read a book which says the boy “tumbled” down the hill. Ask your child, “How do you think the boy went down the hill?” See an “enormous” watermelon? Tell your child all about it. Ask her to use the word in another sentence.

♦ Talk to Your Children About What They Like to Do. Knowing their favorite pastimes, games and friends can help you select books they want to read. Make your book selections meaningful and age appropriate. A baseball player might not be interested in other sports, and some girls really do like science and math. Let your child’s interests guide you.

♦ Visit the Library Together. Many libraries offer reading programs for children, computer training for adults and children and many literacy and technology resources. Contact your local library and ask about their family programs.

♦ Learn Together As a Family. Try to use those “teachable” moments. Are you visiting a fast food restaurant? Ask how many menu items begin with the letter “S”. Read street signs, store signs or sing songs as you drive to appointments.

Think of these activities as EVERYDAY literacy training.
Beginning readers are not “smooth” readers. They may know a word today, but forget it tomorrow. Their reading is inconsistent. Reading is hard work, and mastering the “five building blocks of reading” takes time and practice.

Most educators believe a beginning reader should spend at least 20 minutes a day reading with or to someone to develop their reading skills.

Parents may better understand how children learn to read by reviewing the following list of critical skills children need to become successful readers by the third grade.

Parents are encouraged to become familiar with these essential reading skills, so that you can actively support your child’s reading efforts, and aid in the development of specific literacy skills.

Reading success begins with mastering the five essential parts of reading:

- **Phonemic Awareness**
- **Phonics**
- **Vocabulary**
- **Fluency**
- **Comprehension**

### The Five Essential Parts of Reading

1. **Phonemic Awareness** *(Spoken Words)*

   Before a child ever sees a written word, he or she will hear thousands of spoken words.

   Spoken words are a series of sounds, and a child needs to be aware of how sounds work before she can read. Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear, identify and understand that words are made up of separate sounds.

   ► **Parent Suggestion**: Singing songs and playing games with words. Babies and children love silly songs and nursery rhymes. As a child ages, the games become more advanced like rhyming and rapping. Ask who can think of three words that rhyme with chilly? Sing songs from a book and point to the letters as you sing. Children learn faster by hearing the words and seeing the letters together.
Phonics—(Written Words)

Reading can occur when children start to see that written letters represent the sounds of speech. It’s like learning a “code” and gaining this skill can be fun. Teachers call the knowledge of how letters represent sounds “phonics.”

Parent Suggestion: Look for words in our environment. Billboards, store displays, even television commercials can be used to improve phonetic development. Point out things you see like insects, animals and trees, then talk about them. Take time to sound the words out. Sing, play word games and talk with your child. Don’t worry about being the “teacher”— make learning fun for both of you.

Vocabulary—(Word Power)

Learning words and what they mean is building vocabulary. Learning new words gives our children “word power.” Researchers have proven that there is a strong connection between the size of a child’s vocabulary and how well he reads, writes and does in school.

Parent Suggestion: Point out two or three new words to your child each day while shopping, playing or driving. Are you reading the paper? Find an interesting word and explain its meaning. Use the new word in the sentence. Buying mangos? Point out the sign in the produce section and say the name of the fruit. Ask your child to identify letters in the word, and to find other foods that begin with the letter “M”.

Fluency—(Smooth Reader)

This complex sounding word simply means learning to read quickly and accurately. Children need to practice reading to become “fluent” readers, just as they need to practice to become bike riders, ball players and skateboarders. Fluent readers can recognize certain words without sounding them out. They also read aloud without difficulty.

Parent Suggestion: Read your child’s favorite book over and over, take turns reading different books, encourage your child to sound out words, search for words in the dictionary to find correct spellings and demonstrate how to use the words in sentences. Remember: Enjoy your time together.

Comprehension— (Understanding What It Means)

There is no point to reading, if you don’t understand what you have read. We read for a reason—to learn the latest news, look-up directions, or review a new recipe. If your child does not understand what he or she read, then your child is not reading. Children need to be taught strategies to help them understand written words (text).

Parent Suggestion: Children improve their understanding of what they read by using reading strategies. Ask your child to make predictions about what she has read. Organizing her thoughts, creating mental pictures and summarizing the story are all tasks that improve comprehension. A good reader uses these steps or strategies to understand what she has read.
On The Road To Reading—The Preschool Years

The single most important thing families can do to help children become “literate” (readers and writers) is to read to them! It’s easy to bring books into your young child’s life.

♦ Establish a reading routine. Find a time when your child is most able to settle down for at least 20 minutes. Nap time or after a bath seem to be good choices.

♦ Read together everyday. Encourage Dad or Grand-dad to become reading partners. Reading together can be a “bonding” time. Let children know that reading is a skill everyone needs and enjoys.

♦ Ask Questions. Ask your child questions about the story that can be answered by looking at the pictures.

Remember, not to overdo the questions. You want this time together to be fun and relaxing. Special memories can be made during “story time.”

On the Road To Reading—Kindergarten and First Grade

Your child’s formal education is just beginning. He or she is probably excited and a little afraid of this new adventure. What can you do to make her first school experiences positive?

Support what your child is learning in school about letters and sounds. Take an active role in your child’s literacy development.

Help your child practice and learn the alphabet. Hang posters of the alphabet on bedroom walls. Make an alphabet book and read books from school. Listen to your child read, and discuss problem sounds and words.

Encourage your child to write and spell.

Writing helps a child become a better reader, and reading helps a child become a better writer. Help your child write about a favorite toy or write an email to a family member. Let your child write simple appointment reminders. Practice reading and writing the words your child has learned in school.

Help your child build vocabulary and comprehension.

Children love to have family read to them, but do you give them time to “explore” the story? Stop and ask questions about the story being read. Can she retell the story in her own words? Check to see if your child understands or “comprehends” what you or she has read. Read and discuss it again if necessary.

Learning depends on repetition.

“ We shouldn’t teach great books; we should teach a love of reading.”

B. F. Skinner

We shouldn’t teach great books; we should teach a love of reading.”

B. F. Skinner
**Young Readers: Second and Third Grade**

In second and third grade classrooms, teachers help children learn the spellings and meanings of new words, and to recognize common spelling patterns in words. Students begin to focus on word parts like prefixes (beginnings), suffixes (endings) and root words, (main part of the word) and reading smoothly (fluency).

Teachers teach new words that the students are about to read, and show the children how to use the dictionary and thesaurus to learn the meanings of words. Learning new words increases their vocabulary and broadens their knowledge of the world around them. Class discussions focusing on what has been read improves reading comprehension.

![Image of a boy reading]

**What can parents do to help their young readers?**

1. **Be a patient partner.** Ask your child if she would like a reading “partner.” Review and practice new words, help her look-up definitions, study word parts and remember to be patient during the learning process.

2. **Build a home library.** Expand your child’s interests and knowledge through books. Visit yard-sales and used book stores. Buy inexpensive books and read together, or talk about what your child has read to you. Discussions can improve vocabulary and comprehension.

3. **Support school efforts.** Is your child keeping a journal? Listen to the journal entries and talk about them. Review writing and reading assignments, and work with your child’s school to implement reading and writing goals.

4. **Talk with Teachers.** Do you have questions about your child’s reading progress? Meet with teachers to discuss your concerns, and ask how you can help your child become a better reader.

---

**Parental Involvement Means Dads, too!**

Moms are often the family’s major communicator with schools. Researchers believe that a child’s school success is enhanced when “Dad” becomes involved in his child’s education.

Dad, Granddad, Uncle, etc., can be especially effective in showing the child that reading is not a “girly” thing to do.

Reading not only assists the child with school success, it offers “Dad” an opportunity to develop his relationship with his child.

The National Literacy Trust, [http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/) reports that shared reading with Dad can have the following benefits for children:

- Increased enjoyment of reading and better literacy skills
- Better exam results
- Better school attendance and behavior
- Higher quality of family relationships
- Better mental health
- Increased self-esteem

“**A parent’s job is to build the language of self-talk—language that allows children to maintain a positive view of themselves.**

This means avoiding any hint that they may not ultimately become successful readers...

No purpose is served by introducing the notion of failure to children...”

_Vera Goodman_

“Parents as Reading Coaches”

[www.readingwings.com](http://www.readingwings.com)

---

In second and third grade classrooms, teachers help children learn the spellings and meanings of new words, and to recognize common spelling patterns in words. Students begin to focus on word parts like prefixes (beginnings), suffixes (endings) and root words, (main part of the word) and reading smoothly (fluency).

Dad, let your children see you read. Or, read with or to your child.

Together, you can explore the world.
Resource List for "Let's Read Together!"

National Institute for Literacy—Partnership for Reading

- A Child Becomes A Reader—Proven Ideas for Parents Birth through Preschool and Kindergarten through Grade Three
- Dad’s Playbook, Coaching Kids To Read
- Helping Your Child Become A Reader
- Big Dreams, A Family Book About Reading

Articles and Websites

- “7 Ways to Build a Better Reader for Ages 3-5,” http://momshomeroom.msn.com
- “A Family’s Role in Developing Literacy at Home,” www.education.com
- “An Interview with Stephanie Heinchon: About Literacy and Inspired”, www.educationnews.org
- “Building Literacy Skills At Home,” http://christchurchcitylibraries.com
- “Building Your Child’s Vocabulary,” www.readingrockets.org
- “Literacy Tips,” http://pbskids.org
- “Moving into Reading: Preschool through Grade Two,” www.kidsource.com
- “Reading’s Fab Five,” http://www.readingcoachonline.com

Parent Education Network (PEN)  2107 Industrial Highway  York, PA  17402  
Tel:  (800) 522 - 5827 V/TTY or (717) 600 - 0100 V/TTY  
Spanish:  (800) 441 - 5028  ■ Fax:  (717) 600 - 8101  
Email: pen@parentednet.org  Website: www.parentednet.org  
Follow us!  
www.facebook.com/ParentEducationNetworkYork  
www.twitter.com/PENYork