

Raising STRONGER Readers

By Dr. Raymond J. Huntington



M

ost parents have heard a great deal about the importance of doing everything possible to boost their children's reading ability at home. While your child's teacher can often be the best source for practical tips on how to do so, I highly recommend the Partnership for Reading as an additional resource for ideas and information.

The Partnership for Reading is the largest campaign ever created to improve reading achievement among children. Bringing together the resources of the U.S. Department of Education, the National Institute for Literacy, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the effort offers support for both educators and parents who want to become more active and effective in helping children master reading skills.

One of my favorite resources is the colorful booklet "A Child Becomes a Reader," which has been developed especially for parents of children in kindergarten through third grade. Available online at www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading and by mail by calling 1-800-228-8813, the booklet tells parents which skills should be mastered at each grade, the qualities of effective classrooms at each grade, and offers easy-to-follow advice on how to strengthen reading skills at home.

Readers who follow this column may be familiar with many of the tips that we've passed along based on our experience at Huntington Learning Center, but there are several additional tips in this booklet that are especially interesting and well worth repeating:

For children in kindergarten and first grade:

Encourage children to be storytellers by asking your child to use his or her imagination to make up stories and tell them out loud. As the stories unfold, ask your child questions to expand his or her imaginative reach. Ask your son why the fuzzy dog he's describing in his story ran away from home and how far the little boy had to go to catch up to him. Pressing for details can make the storytelling more interesting. It can also help children understand that reading and storytelling work together to create a fun experience.

Focus your child's attention on the sounds of spoken language. Phonological awareness – the ability to recognize the various sounds in spoken language – plays an important part in a child's ability to recognize written language, and it can be fun and easy to focus your child's attention on the various sounds in spoken language. Singing or saying nursery rhymes and songs, playing word games and reading stories and poems aloud can enhance these skills.

Read aloud with your children. There's a very good reason why you hear this again and again. It's a fine way to help children learn to read, and to show that reading can be a wonderful experience to share together. For younger children, reading aloud also reinforces phonemic awareness of the sounds of letters and words and the sentences on the page. Younger children will also enjoy the process more if you add a little drama – using sound effects and showing you're excited about the story as it unfolds.

Build vocabulary, knowledge and comprehension at the same time. When you're reading with your child, take a break between pages or chapters to talk about the meaning of the book. It can also be useful to help your child make connections between what's happening in the book and in his or her own life. Encourage your son or daughter to ask you questions, and to explain what the story is about in his or her own words.

For children in second and third grade:

Encourage your child to write often. Meaningful writing tasks can help children learn to express ideas. Many everyday tasks – such as writing letters and thank you notes to relatives and friends, compiling grocery lists and "things-to-do" notes – can help young readers articulate their thoughts and broaden their vocabulary.

Practice using new words. Encourage your son or daughter to make up sentences with new words, and to use the words in other situations. Show your children how to use the dictionary or thesaurus to check on the meanings of new words.

Make reading at home a better learning experience. If your child is a struggling reader who tends to read slowly and make mistakes, gently emphasize that it's a good idea to read a paragraph or a page a few times for more practice and to better understand the meaning. And listen carefully when your child reads aloud from books he or she has brought home from school. Be patient, and let your son or daughter know that reading skills are something to be proud of.

These are just a few of the tips offered by the booklet, which also includes an extensive list of additional resources for parents and caregivers who want to become more active in their children's reading instruction. With a quick glance at the website or a call to the toll-free number, virtually every parent can ensure that family reading time strengthens the foundation for academic achievement for years to come. ❖

Dr. Raymond J. Huntington and Eileen Huntington are co-founders of Huntington Learning Center, which has helped children achieve success in school for 26 years. For more information about how Huntington can help your child, call 1 800 CAN LEARN.