
READING—ENCOURAGING POSITIVE ATTITUDES: STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS

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In the classroom, reading instruction typically focuses on specific *skills* such as sounding out words and building vocabulary. However, the development of *positive reading attitudes* is often overlooked. Children with positive reading attitudes tend to be willing to read, enjoy reading, become proficient, and become lifelong readers. On the other hand, children with poor attitudes toward reading may only read when they have to read, tend to avoid reading, and may even refuse to read altogether. A child's attitude toward reading may have a profound impact upon his or her overall academic progress.

The Role of Parents in Promoting Positive Reading Attitudes

As children progress from early childhood through their school years, they develop strong likes and dislikes, including positive or negative attitudes toward reading. Parents may underestimate the critical role they play in the development and shaping of their child's reading attitude. For example, young children view their parents as experts. Therefore, the information and values that parents share with their children about the importance of reading can significantly affect the attitudes that children develop.

Parents are also role models for their children. By observing the attitudes that their parents exhibit—both verbally and nonverbally—toward reading, children will tend to develop and demonstrate similar attitudes. In addition, because children (particularly preschoolers) seek and desire approval from their parents, they tend to develop the attitudes and values that parents will praise and reinforce.

How Parents Can Promote Positive Reading Attitudes

- *Provide a variety of reading materials in the home:* This can include magazines, newspapers, books, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and other reference materials. Your children will be more likely to read for pleasure and to obtain information if there is reading material around.
- *Let your children know how much you enjoy and learn from reading:* Your excitement and interest in reading will transfer to your children. Just observing you read helps your children become aware of the value you place on reading.
- *Read with and to your children:* Young children as well as older children enjoy listening to stories read with and to them. Engage in joint storybook reading with younger children and older children who struggle with reading. Take turns reading a few pages. Also, consider setting aside a family reading time that is held on a regular basis. Each member of the family can read a portion of a book.
- *Talk about reading materials with your children:* Ask literal and inferential questions and have a conversation about the contents of the story. This can occur while you and your child are engaged in reading a story and also before you begin or at the completion of reading a story.
- *Visit the library:* Have your children select their own reading materials based on their individual interests. Frequently, a story time is offered at the local library, which can be a particularly enjoyable activity for young children.
- *Acknowledge your child when he or she reads or shares information obtained from reading:* Because children want to please their parents, your recognition and positive reaction will have a significant impact upon your children's desire to read.

The Role of Teachers in Promoting Positive Reading Attitudes

Children tend to attribute considerable expertise and wisdom to their teachers, particularly in preschool and primary grades. Most children are eager to please their teachers as much as their parents and will be quick to model the attitudes and behaviors they observe in school. Because they directly

teach reading, teachers may overlook opportunities to reinforce reading for pleasure—and not just for homework.

How Teachers Can Promote Positive Reading Attitudes

- *Provide a variety of high interest reading materials of various grade levels in the classroom:* This can be accomplished by obtaining magazines, newspapers, books, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and other reference materials that contain content that matches students' interests. Students' interests can be determined through interviews or a survey.
- *Model and demonstrate reading:* Help children realize how much you value reading.
- *Shape children's attitudes toward reading:* Provide systematic reinforcement (such as praise) when children are engaged in reading activities.
- *Spend time helping children acquire basic reading skills:* This will ease the cognitive process of gaining meaning and enjoyment from reading if basic reading skills such as word recognition have not been achieved at an adequate level. Increasing fluency through repeated readings of passages may help children achieve word recognition skills. This will likely facilitate children's confidence, competence, and positive perceptions about themselves as readers.
- *Help children realize that positive outcomes are likely if considerable effort is made toward engaging in reading activities:* If children do not attribute success to their efforts, you may want to consider implementing attribution retraining techniques that consist of helping children realize that successful outcomes are due to effort rather than external factors beyond their control. (See Carr & Borkowski, 1989, for information about this method; see "Resources" below.)

Giving the Gift of Reading

Be alert to the many activities of modern society that compete for reading time—video games, television, sports, computers. Parents and teachers today face a significant challenge to create a home and school environment that supports and instills a love for reading. However, your efforts will bring children the gift of a life-long habit of reading.

Resources

Carr, M., & Borkowski, J. G. (1989). Attributional training and the generalization of reading strategies with underachieving children. *Learning and Individual Differences, 1*, 327–341.

Gambrell, L. B., Morrow, L. M., Neuman, S. B., & Pressley, M. (2003). *Best practices in literacy instruction* (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford. ISBN: 1572308753.

Norton, D., & Norton, S. (2002). *Through the eyes of a child: An introduction to children's literature* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. ISBN: 013042207X.

Pressley, M. (2002). *Reading instruction that works: The case for balanced teaching* (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford. ISBN: 1572307331.

Wood, T. (2004). *See Johnny read! The 5 most effective ways to end your son's reading problems*. New York: McGraw Hill/Contemporary Books. ISBN: 0071417214.

Websites

Reading Rockets—www.readingrockets.org

Provides a wide range of ideas, articles, and strategies for parents and teachers.

Reading Pains—www.readingpains.com

Provides information and articles for parents. This site was created by Tracy Wood, an author and a parent of a child with reading problems.

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