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—Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings

One of the most important things parents can do, other than to help their children grow up happy and healthy, is to help them develop strong reading skills. Many parents are surprised to learn just how vital reading is to their child’s success in school and in life. Helping your child learn to read affects not only how well they perform in school, but also how successful they are throughout their lives.

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A home for my books

For children ages two through six

Borrow books from your local library. Go to the children’s section and pick books for your child. Choose books in your child’s interests. Put a special place for your child’s books so that they know where to look for them. A cardboard box that you decorate together could make a good bookcase, or you might clear one of the family bookshelves. Ask your child to arrange his or her books in some order—favorite, best books, books about animals, holiday books. Use whatever method will help your child most easily find reading material for different moods, times, and interests. Borrow books from your local library. Go to the children’s section and pick books for your child. Choose books in your child’s interests. Put a special place for your child’s books so that they know where to look for them. A cardboard box that you decorate together could make a good bookcase, or you might clear one of the family bookshelves. Ask your child to arrange his or her books in some order—favorite, best books, books about animals, holiday books. Use whatever method will help your child most easily find reading material for different moods, times, and interests.

tips for parents

A reading checklist

There are many ways that you can encourage your child to become a reader. Here are 10 tips for parents to ensure that you are on track for helping them become successful readers.

For toddlers (from one to three years)

Do I provide a comfortable place for my child to read in peace? Does my child enjoy the book we are reading? How do I encourage my child to “pretend to read,” joining in where he or she has made connections? Do I provide a comfortable place for our story time? Is my child happy here? Am I showing my child the pictures in the book? Am I changing the tone of my voice as I read to show emotion and excitement? Do I point out letters, such as the first letter of my child’s name? Do I encourage my child to ask questions? Does my child enjoy the book we are reading? How do I encourage my child to “pretend to read,” joining in where he or she has made connections? Do I provide a comfortable place for our story time? Is my child happy here? Am I showing my child the pictures in the book? Am I changing the tone of my voice as I read to show emotion and excitement? Do I point out letters, such as the first letter of my child’s name? Do I encourage my child to ask questions?

For preschoolers (from three to four years)

Do I encourage my child to “pretend to read,” joining in where he or she has made connections? Do I provide a comfortable place for our story time? Is my child happy here? Am I showing my child the pictures in the book? Am I changing the tone of my voice as I read to show emotion and excitement? Do I point out letters, such as the first letter of my child’s name? Do I encourage my child to ask questions? Does my child enjoy the book we are reading? How do I encourage my child to “pretend to read,” joining in where he or she has made connections? Do I provide a comfortable place for our story time? Is my child happy here? Am I showing my child the pictures in the book? Am I changing the tone of my voice as I read to show emotion and excitement? Do I point out letters, such as the first letter of my child’s name? Do I encourage my child to ask questions?

For babies (from six weeks to one year)

Do I read to my child? Does my child enjoy the book we are reading? How do I encourage my child to “pretend to read,” joining in where he or she has made connections? Do I provide a comfortable place for our story time? Is my child happy here? Am I showing my child the pictures in the book? Am I changing the tone of my voice as I read to show emotion and excitement? Do I point out letters, such as the first letter of my child’s name? Do I encourage my child to ask questions? Does my child enjoy the book we are reading? How do I encourage my child to “pretend to read,” joining in where he or she has made connections? Do I provide a comfortable place for our story time? Is my child happy here? Am I showing my child the pictures in the book? Am I changing the tone of my voice as I read to show emotion and excitement? Do I point out letters, such as the first letter of my child’s name? Do I encourage my child to ask questions?

A bookcase, cardboard box, or other materials to make a place for books.

You can arrange your child’s books in several ways. Use whatever method will help your child most easily find reading material for different moods, times, and interests. You can arrange your child’s books in several ways. Use whatever method will help your child most easily find reading material for different moods, times, and interests.

Encourage family members and friends to give your child books for birthdays and other occasions.

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Borrow books from your local library. Go to the children’s section and pick books for your child. Choose books in your child’s interests. Put a special place for your child’s books so that they know where to look for them. A cardboard box that you decorate together could make a good bookcase, or you might clear one of the family bookshelves. Ask your child to arrange his or her books in some order—favorite, best books, books about animals, holiday books. Use whatever method will help your child most easily find reading material for different moods, times, and interests.

Books from bookstores, garage sales, flea markets, used bookstores, or sales at your local library; and...