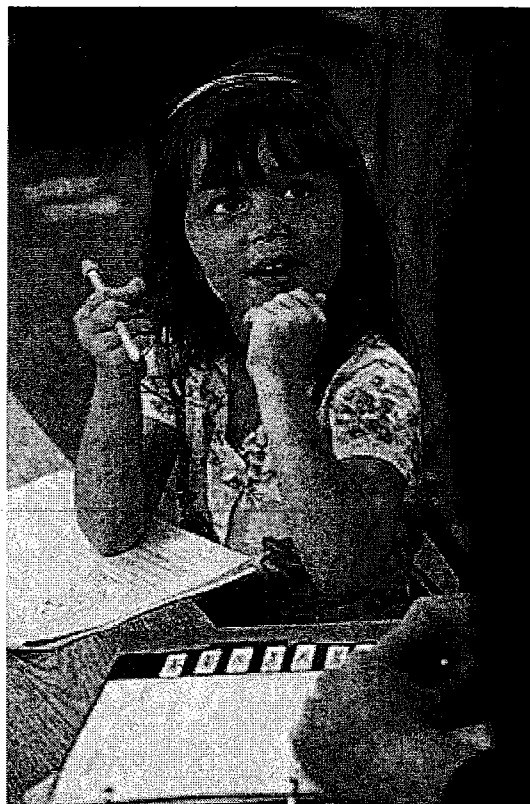


How Can I Help at Home? 5 Ways to Support Your Child's Reading and Writing Life

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Parents often ask, "What can I do to help my child with reading and writing? How can I help at home?" Here are some simple routines you can build at home to promote a love of reading and writing and support your child's progress at school!



1. Create a special workspace. Kids have independent spots in their classrooms, tools they need nearby and accessible, and clear expectations for how they'll use their work time. You can find ways to mirror these structures at home. Find a shelf, table, or crate where you can keep reading and writing tools: a jar of pens, writing paper choices and stationery, tape, staplers, scissors, alphabet charts, sight word lists, a basket of just-right books, their own "published" writing, or a place to store their at-home reading baggy. Give your child ownership with these materials. Ask him to help you design the space, organize the materials, and make labels and signs for the tools. Reflect on how your child does his best work. It need not be a desk, or the kitchen table. Some children are far more focused with a clipboard on the rug, or curled up in a cozy, quiet nook.

2. Read aloud. A child's love of reading begins with a parent's love of reading. Reading aloud to your child daily allows you to model so much of what readers authentically do: read with fluency and expression, share ideas, laugh, worry, gasp, cry, ask questions, and at times, reread to self-correct, or clarify. By reading books that often exceed your child's independent reading level, you're exposing her to richer, intellectually engaging literature while developing a larger vocabulary. For younger children, you may decide to begin with books that can be read in one sitting before moving into stories that need to be held onto across days. Use some of your read aloud time across the week to engage in conversations before, after, and during the read aloud to support your child's comprehension of texts. Predict, wonder, react to the character, retell the events so far before reading on... However, be sure to be mindful of pace! Don't wait until the last page to pause and talk about the story, but don't stop so frequently that the rhythm of the book begins to fall apart. Think Goldilocks: just right! Find ways to bring your reading to life! Act out scenes in fun, simple ways. Use gestures to mimic actions. Change your voice to match the character. Take turns with your child! Dramatization boosts engagement, helps children envision the scene, deepens comprehension, and promotes fluency. Read a wide variety of genres: poetry, information books, how-to books, realistic fiction, fables, and persuasive letters! While read aloud certainly supports a child's comprehension, it also serves as a building block for writing and language development. Ask your child's teacher what kind of writing the class is currently engaged in; then, find books that echo the genre for read aloud time at home!

3. Storytell! Put the pencil down for just a moment. Writing began as an oral tradition. Kids who talk a lot are more apt to become kids who write a lot. Develop your child's writing ability by finding ways to engage in storytelling across the week. Write out loud, telling the story of a recent shared experience: the trip to the supermarket, playing at the park, visiting the museum, getting ready for bed, etc. Help your child think about sequence, using transitional language to put the parts together. "One chilly afternoon...then...suddenly...after that...finally..." Help your child add detail to their oral story. Prompt with questions like, "And what did you say next?" "How did you feel?" "What did you do after that?" Echo their story back with greater expression, helping them hear the shape and affect of their story, while also modeling proper grammatical structure. Tell your own bedtime stories. Weave together fictional, even wacky, tales that hold onto the narrative sequence, including lines of dialogue, action and feelings across each scene. Storytell in other genres! Teach out loud! Be experts and have your child take on the voice of a newscaster, teaching information about a favorite topic while speaking into a pretend microphone. "Did you know... Another important fact to learn about this is..." Build, cook, play, draw! Tell the steps of your process to compose how-to-books aloud. "First, we need to get... Then, make sure to... After that..." You might even record video or sound of your child's oral story. Later, kids might listen to themselves, adding on aloud, drawing pictures to match, and writing the words across pages!

4. Start a book club! Reading is inherently social. Recruit friends or family to form a book club, scheduling reading playdates that can include opportunities for club members to read aloud together, act out scenes, ask questions, share ideas, compare post-it notes, and even rehearse for a readers theater performance of the book (or a chapter.) If hosting these book club meetings feels tricky to arrange, don't worry! You can be your child's reading partner instead. Visit the local library or bookstore and find titles at your child's current just-right reading level. You'll want at least two copies of the book so you can set a goal, then engage in independent reading separately before finding a time to come together to discuss what's happening, make predictions, share ideas, reread scenes, and make plans for the next "club" meeting.

5. Be co-authors! Find ways to write together. Help your youngest writers make signs or labels for their bedroom or the kitchen pantry (unless you're okay with covering your living room with post-its, too!) Give your child time to practice saying words out loud slowly, isolating sounds and recording the letters she knows. Meanwhile, fill in the letters your child is not yet ready to identify, vowels for instance. Write patterns books using sight words he's practicing. Record a sentence together. Then, have your child keep it going across pages you can staple into a longer book. You might take photos of simple things around the house and print them out to illustrate the pages of the book, using a pattern like: We have some _____ in our house. Write new endings to favorite books after a read aloud. Write reviews of recent books, movies, and games you love or didn't enjoy. Digitalize it! Post your child's reviews online to share how this writing is used in the real world and reaches an audience right away! Set up email pen pals with a distant relative, friend from school, or neighbor. Having an immediate audience can give children more incentive for writing daily, engaging their reader, rereading for clarity, and editing to make it easy to read. Help you child understand the value of writing in everyday routines. Enlist your child's help with daily writing tasks: ask your child to record the grocery list as you survey the pantry; jot down the directions to the softball field; make a list of names for birthday invitations; write thank you cards; send an older sibling a text message, etc.