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BUSY PARENTS CAN HELP THEIR CHILDREN BE GOOD READERS

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Busy Parent: "Is there anything I can do at home to help my child be a good reader?"

Primary Teacher: "Yes. There are things you can do."

Busy Parent: "Name some things so I can get started."

Primary Teacher: "Well, you can"

What do you tell the parents of a primary grade child when they ask this age-old question. "How can I help my child be a good reader?" Or what do you say at the next P.T.A. meeting when your principal calls on you to address this question?

You know that busy parents want easy yet purposeful suggestions that require a minimum of time and effort. They also want specific suggestions instead of the vague ones sometimes offered by teachers. You are aware that the most effective suggestions are the ones that fit right into the family's daily schedules, and that the most appreciated suggestions are those that require little or no monetary expenditure. A child's success or failure as a reader is shaped more by the influence of the home than by the teacher and the materials used at school (Larrick, 1975). So given the strict guidelines of limited time, limited effort, and minimum expense, you may offer busy parents the following suggestions for fostering good readers.

1. Do You Know Your A, B, C's?

Children love to play games. They also like to find letters of the alphabet on highway signs and billboards when in the car traveling to and from school, church, shopping, or when traveling on the weekends. Here's how to play a simple alphabet game. The child looks out of the moving car on one side of the road and the parent looks out on the other side. By looking at billboards and road signs, the letters of the alphabet must be observed and spoken out-loud in proper sequence. The object of the game is to try and complete the entire alphabet before the opponent does. The appearance of a previously agreed upon type of car (red convertible, yellow Volkswagen, etc.) causes the player on which side it appears to lose all the letters he has observed and he must begin again with the letter "A."

If two children want to play, they can play without a parent. The parent can still participate by becoming the monitor. Don't be surprised, however, if you find yourself searching the billboards and road signs too. What good practice this alphabet game gives in being observant, paying attention to details and, most important, recognizing the letters of the alphabet. And what fun it is to try and find road signs with the letters "X" and "Z"!

2. *It Sounds Like Fun.*

A child's success in reading is largely dependent on his knowledge of individual letter sounds and the ability to discriminate between these sounds. In order to reinforce what is learned in school about letters and the sounds they stand for, why not play another simple game—a phonics game (Mountain, 1970). This game requires no special materials and can be played at almost any time or place. Say, "I'm thinking of a word that starts with the sound /m/. Guess what it is." Or say, "I see something in the room that begins with the sound /d/. What is it?" The child must use his knowledge of letter sounds in order to answer.

After the child has learned to play this phonics game, vary the game by saying, "I see something in the room that begins with the letter D," or whatever letter you choose to use, this time naming only the letter and not the sound. This requires the child to supply the letter sound himself. After you have played the game this way, vary it again by using ending and middle letters and sounds instead of beginning letters and sounds. However you play it, the child can't lose because he is receiving excellent reinforcement of phonics skills and is having fun doing it.

3. *The Library of All Places.*

It almost goes without saying that to be a good reader you have to read. And in order to read you have to have books. But with the price of books going sky-high, it's nice to know there's a place nearby where books are free for the borrowing—the local public library. Take advantage of this handy resource and stock your home with plenty of good books, (Knudson, 1970).

There is usually no limit on the number of books you can check out at one time. This permits your child to check out many books and once he is home with them, help him place the books at various locations throughout the house so that no matter where your child might be in the house, a book is within arm's reach for a few moments, or hours, of reading. Regular trips to the library will also insure that books are changed frequently.

Once books have been selected, perhaps with the help of the children's librarian, schedule enough time during the library visit for a free-reading period. The impact of being in the presence of a room of people reading, young and old alike, can make quite an impression on a young reader. As he begins to feel comfortable and at-home in the library and is acquainted with the children's librarian, he will look forward to regular visits there. A trip to the library may begin to take precedence over a trip to the local toy store or ice cream parlor.

4. *Get Down on Your Knees.*

Clever display of books is as important in reading as advertising is in selling a product. Advertisers use attractive display techniques and encourage people to buy their products by using eye-level displays and attractive arrangement of items for sale. You too can use similar techniques in order to sell your child on the idea of reading.

Begin your advertising campaign by getting down on your knees. Now you see from your child's point of view and are in a better position to survey your home for potential book centers. If present arrangement of the room

doesn't permit the creation of such a center, perhaps you will want to consider rearranging the room in order to provide the necessary space. Books can be attractively displayed on an eye-level bookshelf, table, or desk. Featuring several different books in the center each week may be just the marketing strategy you're looking for.

You will also want to make books readily available in other rooms of the house. Magazine racks and wicker baskets always provide attractive containers for books. One mother displays her child's books in a saucer-shaped, brass bowl. An antique washstand serves another home as an inviting book center. Drawers that once held wash cloths, towels, soap, and other toiletries now contain books, paper, crayons, and other items of interest to a young reader. One concerned father displays colorful books around, and on top of, the family television set in hopes that his children will select one of the books to read instead of turning on the television set. As you survey your home, on bended knees, look for original containers and locations in which to present books.

The preceding suggestions describe ways busy parents can help their primary grade children be good readers. Each suggestion requires a minimum of time and effort from parents by capitalizing on readily accessible resources such as highway billboards and road signs and the local public library. These suggestions are popular because children enjoy participating in games and activities that provide together time with their parents. This together time that is so important to a good parent-child relationship may be an added incentive for busy parents who want to make the most of the time they have with their children. Therefore, these suggestions do more than just foster good readers. They also encourage good relationships between parents and children. Busy parents will be doubly grateful for these helpful suggestions.

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