7-1-1971

"An Ounce of Prevention …"

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Recommended Citation
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It has been said that non-readers are the greatest problem in American education. It is also true that these same non-readers continue to be problems as they take their place in the mainstream of American life. The schools are doing much to remedy these problems, but the home must also cooperate in this project. With the cooperation of home and school these problems can, in a large measure, be prevented. This author proposes to set down some guidelines for parents who are interested in starting their child on the road to successful reading experiences.

Parents should be aware that an important part of preparing a child for reading should be to serve as a model for the child. The language spoken in the home should be of the best quality and the child should be encouraged by example at an early age to speak in like style. The same principle applies to books and reading in the home. If the child sees the parents reading, it will be easy for him to see that reading is an enjoyable and worthwhile experience. Still another way in which parents can serve as a model for their child is to express or make apparent their positive feelings toward the school and learning. This attitude can do much to create in the child the belief that education is an important privilege—one to be valued. He will enter school with an emotional and psychological readiness for learning.

A second contribution parents can make to the reading readiness process is to aid in the development of language arts skills. This can be done in a number of ways, the most obvious and important of which is talking. Even though a baby does not understand words and cannot talk, he responds in his own way to the talking of adults. And soon this response becomes words—sooner because someone has been encouraging him. This communication encourages vocalization and socialization on the part of the child and is necessary for his verbal development. It is an accepted fact that the child who talks easily and well is better prepared for learning to read. Another way to aid in the development of language arts skills is to read aloud to the child. Even a very young child can benefit from this activity, not only from listening to and talking about a story or a rhyme but also from the close bond which it fosters between parent and child.

A third way in which parents can prepare their child for learning
to read is to develop mental content and experiential background. Reading to the child helps develop language arts skills, as previously mentioned. It also adds to his mental content by providing vicariously those experiences which he cannot experience firsthand. Whenever possible parents should take trips with the child and talk about what they have seen and experienced. These trips can be as short as places of interest in one’s own community or to more distant points. The value is in discussing the experience and broadening his background so as to give meaning to his future reading. The more experience a child brings to his reading, the more meaning he will find in it. New experiences are also a valuable method of developing a child’s vocabulary. Parents should provide books and other types of reading material for the child. This may include those brought home from the library as well as those more readily available within the home. Another way to build mental content is to provide paper and writing tools such as crayons or pencils, and allow the child to experiment with drawing pictures of family experiences or making letters or words.

In conclusion, it is to be emphasized that parents have a responsibility and valuable opportunity to contribute to their child’s success in school. They can do more than anyone else to insure this success. They must be helped to understand this fact and also to implement it to their child’s benefit.