

How to Encourage Children to Read at Home

By Paul Westmoreland

Children often feel under pressure to read at home. That's because reading is nearly always lumped together with the rest of their homework. And that's a rotten place to put books, isn't it?

As a parent I've struggled to get my kids into reading, the same as everyone. And as a children's writer, this struggle comes with an added cloud of shame!

But I have managed it, albeit because the shame of failure has compelled me to succeed.

Getting children started on reading is the hardest part. Until they can read by themselves it's a joint activity. Parents have to devote time to it, same as the kids. And that's a valuable commodity, especially during the week when you have dinners to prepare and bedtimes to struggle through. So you have to make it fun!

How you read is as important as what you read. I start by choosing a room without a TV or any other distractions. I also avoid reading it at the dining table where it feels like homework, because comfy kids read for longer.

Another simple trick that helped my youngest get over the hurdle of reading page after page and helped build his confidence was to take turns in reading: he read a page, I read a page, and so on. Sharing the load like this helped him feel like he wasn't doing all the work. Listening to my pages also helped stoke his interest in the story. Seeing how quickly I could read a page also gave him something to aim for and helped him see that whole pages weren't such a mountain to climb.

The types of books you read are also important. It's no good picking anything, children need to be engaged in the books they read. This is where a trip to your local library is invaluable. They can pick up dozens, try them out like shoes, and pick up another. They can even find an easier read if they feel like it—it really doesn't matter so long as they're reading. They'll progress to more complex stories when they're ready. And if they like the look or premise of a book, that's half the battle to win them over to reading!

I also bear all this in mind when I'm writing for children. At each stage of creating characters and their world, outlining my stories, writing the first draft and editing, I ask myself this: Will it make children want to read more? It's a tough question, sure, but I wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't. So I make every effort to ensure every page is engaging, that the characters are fun to hang out with, and I'm telling stories my readers can relate to and maybe even learn from, and I hope this inspires them to read more.

My last tip is something of a master-stroke. As soon as my eldest could read quietly by herself, I told her this: You can stay up as late as you like, so long as you're in bed and reading.

Sure, in the beginning she read simple books and stayed up far too late. But by the time the novelty of staying up late wore off, she was in the habit of reading every evening and started managing her tiredness. Some nights she now reads a page or two, others it's a couple of chapters, but above all she enjoys reading and that's what it's all about.

This article was written in 2022

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