



REVIEW

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Guide for Parents

ASSOCIATION FOR SUPERVISION AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

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FOCUS: GUIDE FOR PARENTS

The articles on *Helping Your Child* are excerpts from a series of books published by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), US Department of Education. The electronic versions of these books are in public domain and was downloaded from OERI's gopher service on the Internet. Although intended for an American audience, these books contain useful information for parents and schools in Singapore.

Some suggested activities and lists of resources have been excluded because of space constraints. The book on mathematics will be available on the Internet in the near future and Singapore ASCD Review will publish it in a later issue. The books may be obtained from R. Woods, Consumer Information Center, Pueblo, Colorado 81009, USA.

Singapore ASCD wishes to thank OERI for permission to publish excerpts from these books.

- 2 Helping Your Child Get Ready for School
Nancy Paulu

- 9 Helping Your Child Learn to Read
Bernice Cullinan and Brod Bagert

- 18 Help Your Child Learn to Write Well
OERI

- 21 Help Your Child Improve in Test-taking
OERI

- 24 Helping Your Child Use the Library
OERI

- 32 Helping Your Child Learn Geography
Carol Sue Frombolui

- 39 Helping Your Child Learn History
Elaine Wisley Reed

- 47 Helping Your Child Learn Science
OERI

OTHER TOPICS

- 56 A Gentle Push for Reluctant Readers
Quah May Ling

- 59 Adapting Western Counselling Approaches to the Local
Context
Cecelia Soong

Helping Your Child Get Ready for School

Teaching and learning are not mysteries that can only happen in school. They also happen when parents and children do simple things together.

Nancy Paulu

The road to success in school begins early. Good health, loving relationships, and opportunities to learn all help preschool children do well later in life. But many parents wonder, "How can I give these things to my child?"

This article is for all of you who have asked this question. It's for parents, grandparents, and others who want to know what to do to help young children get ready for school. Throughout the preschool years, you can do many simple things to help your child grow, develop, and have fun learning.

Parents and caregivers are busy people. Most of us have many responsibilities: jobs outside the home, laundry to wash, and groceries to buy. When we are tired and under stress, it's often hard to

feel we are being the best parents.

But however busy we may be, there are lots of things we can do to help our children get ready for school - little things that make a big difference. Many of them cost little or nothing and can be done as you go about your daily routines.

Mothers and fathers aren't the only people who help children get ready for school. Entire communities share this job. Businesses, schools, government agencies, and religious and civic organizations help out. So do day care providers, doctors and other health professionals, elected officials, relatives, and neighbors. But no one is more important than parents, because life's most basic lessons are learned early and at home. The first 5 years are when the groundwork

for future development is laid.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE READY FOR SCHOOL?

There is no one quality or skill that children need to do well in school, but a combination of things contributes to success. These include good health and physical well-being, social and emotional maturity, language skills, an ability to solve problems and think creatively, and general knowledge about the world.

As you go about helping your child develop in each of these areas, remember:

- Children develop at different rates, and
- Most children are stronger in some areas than in others.

Remember, too, that being ready for school depends partly on what the school expects. One school may think it's very important for children to sit quietly and know the alphabet. Another may believe it's more important for children to get along well with others.

Children who match the school's expectations may be considered better prepared. You may want to visit your child's school to learn what the principal and teachers expect and discuss any areas of disagreement.

While schools may have different priorities, most educators agree that the following areas are important for success.

Good Health and Physical Well-Being

Young children need nutritious food, enough sleep, safe places to play, and regular medical care. These things help children get a good start in life and lessen the chances that they will later have serious health problems or trouble learning.

Good health for children begins before birth with good prenatal care. Visit a doctor or medical clinic throughout your pregnancy. In addition, eat nourishing foods, avoid alcohol, tobacco, and other harmful drugs, and get plenty of rest.

Pregnant women who don't take good care of themselves increase their chances of giving birth to children who:

- Are low in birth weight, making them more likely to have life-long health and learning problems;
- Develop asthma;
- Are mentally retarded;
- Develop speech and language problems;
- Have short attention spans; or

- Become hyperactive.

If your child already has some of these problems, it is a good idea to consult with your doctor, your school district, or community agencies as soon as possible. Many communities have free or inexpensive services to help you and your child.

Good health for children continues after birth with a balanced diet. School-aged children can concentrate better in class if they eat nutritionally balanced meals. These should include breads, cereals, and other grain products; fruits; vegetables; meat, poultry, fish and alternatives (such as eggs and dried beans and peas); and milk, cheese, and yogurt. Avoid too many fats and sweets.

Children aged 2-5 generally can eat the same foods as adults but in smaller portions. Your child's doctor or clinic can provide advice on feeding babies and toddlers under the age of 2.

Preschoolers require regular medical and dental checkups and immunizations. It's important to find a doctor or a clinic where children can receive routine health care as well as special treatment if they are sick or injured.

Children need immunizations beginning around the age of 2 months to prevent nine diseases: measles, mumps, German measles (rubella), diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, Hib (Haemophilus influenzae type b), polio, and tuberculosis. These diseases can have serious effects on physical and mental development. Regular dental checkups should begin at the latest by the age of 3.

Preschoolers need opportunities to exercise and develop physical coordination. To learn to control large muscles, children need to throw balls, run, jump, climb, and dance to music. To learn to control

small muscles, particularly in the hands and fingers, they need to color with crayons, put together puzzles, use blunt-tipped scissors, and zip jackets. In kindergarten, they will build upon these skills.

Parents of youngsters with disabilities should see a doctor as soon as a problem is suspected. Early intervention can help these children develop to their full potential.

Social and Emotional Preparation

Young children are often very excited about entering school. But when they do, they can face an environment that's different from what they are used to at home or even in preschool. In kindergarten, they will need to work well in large groups and get along with new adults and other children. They will have to share the teacher's attention with other youngsters. The classroom routines may also be different.

Most 5-year-olds do not start school with good social skills or much emotional maturity. These take time and practice to learn. However, children improve their chances for success in kindergarten if they have had opportunities to begin developing these qualities:

Confidence. Children must learn to feel good about themselves and believe they can succeed. Confident children are more willing to attempt new tasks - and try again if they don't succeed the first time.

Independence. Children need to learn to do things for themselves.

Motivation. Children must want to learn.

Curiosity. Children are naturally curious and must remain so in order to get the most out of learning opportunities.

Persistence. Children must learn to finish what they start.

Cooperation. Children must be able to get along with others and learn to share and take turns.

Self-control. Preschoolers must understand that some behaviors, such as hitting and biting, are inappropriate. They need to learn that there are good and bad ways to express anger.

Empathy. Children must learn to have an interest in others and understand how others feel.

Parents, even more than child care centers and good schools, help children develop these skills. Here are some ways you can help your child acquire these positive qualities:

Youngsters must believe that, no matter what, someone will look out for them. Show that you care about your children. They thrive when they have parents or other caregivers who are loving and dependable. Small children need attention, encouragement, hugs, and plenty of lap time. Children who feel loved are more likely to be confident.

Set a good example. Children imitate what they see others do and what they hear others say. When parents exercise and eat nourishing food, children are more likely to do so. When parents treat others with respect, their children probably will, too. If parents share things, their children will learn to be thoughtful of others' feelings.

Have a positive attitude toward learning and toward school. Children come into this world with a powerful need to discover and to explore. Parents need to encourage this curiosity if children are to keep it. Enthusiasm for what children do ("You've drawn a great picture!") helps to make them proud of their achievements.

Children also become excited about school when their parents

show excitement. As your child approaches kindergarten, talk to him about school. Talk about the exciting activities in kindergarten, such as going on field trips and making fun art projects. Be enthusiastic as you describe what he will learn in school - how to read and measure and weigh things, for example.

Provide opportunities for repetition. It takes practice to crawl, pronounce new words, or drink from a cup. Children don't get bored when they repeat things. Instead, repeating things until they are learned helps youngsters build the confidence needed to try something new.

Use appropriate discipline. All children need to have limits set for them. Children whose parents give firm but loving discipline are generally more skilled socially and do better in school than children whose parents set too few or too many limits. Here are some tips.

- Direct children's activities, but don't make unnecessary restrictions or try to dominate.
- Offer reasons when asking your child to do something (For example, say, "Please move the toy truck off the stairs so no one falls over it" - not, "Do it because I said so.").
- Listen to your children to find out how they feel and whether they need any special support.
- Show love and respect when you are angry. Criticize a child's behavior but not the child (For example, say, "I love you, but it is not okay for you to draw pictures on the walls. I get angry when you do that.").
- Help your children make choices and work out problems (You might ask your 4-year-old, "What can we do to keep Kevin from knocking over your

blocks?").

- Be positive and encouraging. Praise your child for a job well done. Smiles and encouragement go much further to shape good behavior than harsh punishment.

Let children do many things by themselves. Young children need to be closely watched. But they learn to be independent and to develop confidence by doing tasks such as dressing themselves and putting their toys away. It's also important to let them make choices, rather than deciding everything for them. Remember to give them a choice only when there really is one.

Encourage your children to play with other children and be with adults who are not family members. Preschoolers need these social opportunities to learn to see the point of view of others. Young children are more likely to get along with teachers and classmates if they already have had experiences with different adults and children.

Language and General Knowledge

Kindergarteners participate in many activities that require them to use language and to solve problems. Children who can't or don't communicate easily may have problems in school. There are many things you can do to help children learn to communicate, solve problems, and develop an understanding of the world. You can:

Give your child opportunities to play. Play is how children learn. It is the natural way for them to explore, to become creative, and to develop academic and social skills. Play helps them learn to solve problems - for example, a wagon tips over, and children must figure out how to get it upright again. Children learn about geometry, shapes,

and balance when they stack up blocks. Playing with others helps children learn how to negotiate.

Talk to your children, beginning at birth. Babies need to hear your voice. A television or the radio can't take the place of your voice because it doesn't respond to coos and babbles. The more you talk to your baby, the more he will have to talk about as he gets older. Talking with children broadens their understanding of language and of the world.

Everyday activities, such as eating dinner or taking a bath, provide opportunities to talk, sometimes in detail, about what's happening and respond to your child. "First let's stick the plug in the drain. Now we'll turn on the water. I see you want to put your rubber duck in the bathtub. That's a good idea. Look, it's yellow, just like the rubber duck on 'Sesame Street.' "

Listen to your children. Children have their own special thoughts and feelings, joys and sorrows, hopes and fears. As their language skills develop, encourage them to talk. Listening is the best way to learn what's on their minds and to discover what they know and don't know, and how they think and learn. It also shows children that their feelings and ideas are valuable.

Answer questions and ask questions, particularly ones that require more than a "yes" or "no" response. While walking in a park, for example, most 2- and 3-year-olds will stop to pick up leaves. You might point out how the leaves are the same, and how they are different. With older children you might ask, "What else grows on trees?"

Questions can help children learn to compare and classify things. Answer your children's questions thoughtfully and, when-

ever possible, encourage them to answer their own questions. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. Then together with your child try to find the answer.

Read aloud to your children every day. Reading can begin with babies and continue throughout the preschool years. Even though they don't understand the story or the poem, reading together gives children a chance to learn about language, enjoy the sound of your voice, and be close to you. You don't have to be an excellent reader for your child to enjoy this time together. You may also want to take your child to a local library that offers special story hours.

Make reading materials available. Children develop an interest in language and in reading much sooner if they have books and other reading materials around their homes.

Monitor television viewing. Next to parents, television may be our children's most influential teacher. Good television can introduce children to new worlds and promote learning, but poor or too much TV can be harmful.

Be realistic about your children's abilities and interests. Children usually do best in school when parents estimate their abilities correctly. Parents must set high standards and encourage their preschoolers to try new things. Children who aren't challenged become bored. But ones who are pushed along too quickly, or are asked to do things that don't interest them, can become frustrated and unhappy.

Try to keep your children from being labeled. Labels such as "dumb" or "stupid" have a powerful effect on a child's confidence and school performance. Remember to praise your child for a job well done.

Provide opportunities to do and see things. The more varied the experiences that children have, the more they learn about the world. No matter where you live, your community can provide new experiences. Go for walks in your neighborhood, or go places on the bus. Visit museums, libraries, zoos, and other community resources.

If you live in the city, spend a day in the country (or if you live in the country, spend a day in the city). Let your children hear and make music, dance, and paint. Let them participate in activities that help to develop their imaginations and let them express their ideas and feelings.

WHAT ABOUT KINDERGARTEN?

As the first day of school approaches, however, you may want to do extra things to make the school seem a friendlier place for both you and your child.

Find out as much as you can about the school before your child enters it. You will want to learn:

- The principal's name;
- The kindergarten teacher's name;
- When to register for kindergarten and what forms need to be filled out;
- What immunizations are required for school entry;
- A description of the kindergarten program;
- The kindergarten yearly calendar and daily schedule;
- Transportation procedures;
- Food service arrangements; and
- How you can become involved in your child's education and in the school.

Some schools will send you this information. Or they may hold an orientation meeting in the spring

for parents who expect to enroll their children in kindergarten the following fall. If they don't, you can call the principal's office to ask or to arrange a visit.

Find out in advance what the school expects from entering kindergarten students. If you know a year or two ahead of time, you will be in a better position to prepare your child. Sometimes parents and caregivers don't think the expectations are right for their children. If that is the case, you may want to meet with the principal or kindergarten teachers to talk about the expectations and ways to seek changes in the kindergarten program.

Visit the school with your child so your child can become familiar with it, and it won't seem scary. Walk up and down the hallways to learn where things are. Observe the other children and the classrooms.

Talk with your child about school. During your visit, make positive comments about the school - your good attitude will rub off! ("Look at all the boys and girls painting in this classroom. Doesn't that look like fun!") Tell your child about what the children do when classes begin.

Talk about the teachers and how they will help your child learn new things. Encourage your child to look at the teacher as a wise friend toward whom children should be courteous. Explain to your child how important it is to go to class each day.

If possible, consider volunteering to help out in the school. The staff may appreciate having an extra adult to help do everything from passing out paper and pencils in the classrooms to supervising on the playground. Volunteering is a good way to learn more about the school and to meet its staff and other parents.

When the long-awaited first day

WHAT WE CAN DO TO HELP OUR CHILDREN LEARN

Listen to them and pay attention to their problems.
Read with them.
Tell family stories.
Limit their television watching.
Have books and other reading materials in the house.
Look up words in the dictionary with them.
Encourage them to use an encyclopedia.
Share favorite poems and songs with them.
Take them to the library - and get them their own library cards. Take them to museums and historical sites, when possible. Discuss the daily news with them.
Go exploring with them and learn about plants, animals, and geography.
Find a quiet place for them to study.
Review their homework.
Meet with their teachers.

Do you have other ideas?

of kindergarten arrives, go to school with your child (but don't stay too long). And be patient. Many young children are overwhelmed at first because they haven't had much experience in dealing with new situations. They may not immediately like school. Your child may cry or cling to you when you say goodbye each morning, but with support from you and the kindergarten teacher, this can rapidly change.

As your child proceeds through school, you will need to continue your encouragement and involvement. But for now, celebrate all that you have accomplished as a parent. Share your children's enthusiasm. Let them know how proud you are as they leave home for their first day of kindergarten. Let them know you believe they will succeed.

GOOD TELEVISION HABITS

Children in the United States have watched an average of 4,000 hours of television by the time they begin school. Most experts agree that this is too much. But banning

television isn't the answer, because good television can spark curiosity and open up new worlds to children. Monitoring how much and what television children watch helps them, starting at an early age, to develop good viewing habits.

Too much television can be harmful because:

- It can expose children to too much sex and violence;
- Children can be unduly influenced by junk-food and toy commercials;
- It can give children a poor model for good behavior before they have developed a clear idea of right and wrong;
- Young children do not have the experience and wisdom to understand complicated plots or scary scenes; and
- Sitting passively in front of the set for extended periods of time can slow young children's social and intellectual development.

Here are some tips to help children develop good television viewing habits.

Keep a record of how many

hours of TV your children watch, and what they watch. Generally, it's good to limit the amount to 2 hours or less a day, although you can make exceptions for special programs.

Learn about current TV programs and videos and select good ones. As parents, you know your children best. So, select TV programs and videos that are meaningful to your family. Some TV programs you may wish to consider include "Captain Kangaroo", "Eureeka's Castle", "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood", "Sesame Street", and "Shining Time Station." Many

other good children's programs, such as Disney and Nickelodeon, are on public television stations and on cable channels.

If you have a VCR, you may wish to seek out videos made by Linda Ellerbee's Lucky Duck Productions. Of course, videos vary in quality, but versions of classic children's books, such as Babar or Snow White, are a good place to start.

Plan with your children (starting at age 3) what programs to watch. After selecting programs appropriate for your children, help them decide which ones to watch.

Turn the TV on when these shows start, and turn the set off when they are over.

Watch television with your children so you can answer questions and talk about what they see. Pay special attention to how they respond so you can help them understand what they're seeing, if that's needed.

Follow-up TV viewing with activities or games. You might have your child tell you a new word he learned on television that you can look up together in the dictionary. Or you might have him make up his own story about one of his fa-

READY-FOR-SCHOOL CHECKLIST

This checklist, although not exhaustive, can help to guide you in preparing your child for school. It's best to look at the items included as goals toward which to aim. They should be done, as much as possible, through everyday life or by fun activities you've planned with your child. If your child lags behind in some areas, don't worry. Remember that all children are unique. They grow and develop at different rates - and no one thing guarantees that a child is ready for school.

Good Health and Physical Well-Being

My child:

- Eats a balanced diet.
- Receives regular medical and dental care and has had all the necessary immunizations.
- Gets plenty of rest.
- Runs, jumps, plays outdoors, and does other activities that help develop large muscles and provide exercise.
- Works puzzles, scribbles, colors, paints, and does other activities that help develop small

muscles.

Social and Emotional Preparation

My child:

- Is learning to be confident enough to explore and try new things.
- Is learning to work well alone and to do many tasks for himself.
- Has many opportunities to be with other children and is learning to cooperate with them.
- Is curious and is motivated to learn.
- Is learning to finish tasks (for example, picks up own toys).
- Is learning to use self-control.
- Can follow simple instructions.
- Helps with family chores.

Language and General Knowledge

My child:

- Has many opportunities to play.
- Is read to every day.
- Has access to books and other reading materials.
- Has his television viewing moni-

tored by an adult.

- Is encouraged to ask questions.
- Is encouraged to solve problems.
- Has opportunities to notice similarities and differences.
- Is encouraged to sort and classify things (for example, by looking for red cars on the highway).
- Is learning to write his name and address.
- Is learning to count and plays counting games.
- Is learning to identify shapes and colors.
- Has opportunities to draw, listen to and make music, and to dance.
- Has opportunities to get first-hand experiences to do things in the world - to see and touch objects, hear new sounds, smell and taste foods, and watch things move.

favorite TV characters. Include the whole family in discussion and activities or games that relate to television programs. Older siblings, aunts, uncles, and grandparents can all contribute.

Make certain that television isn't regularly used as a babysitter. Instead, try to balance good television with other fun activities for your child.

CHOOSING CHILD CARE

More and more children are in preschool or other child care settings before they enter kindergarten. Choosing the right child care is important because it can affect how prepared your child is for school. Some tips to guide you:

Think about the kind of care you want for your child. Possibilities include (a) a relative; (b) a family day care provider, usually a woman who takes care of a small group of children in her home; (c) a child care center, which generally offers a curriculum and staff with educational backgrounds in early childhood development; and (d) a caregiver who comes into your home.

Figure out what suits your budget and what you can expect to spend in your community. Recognize that there are many ways to find good care. Ask friends and neighbors how they found child care. See if they, or any day care providers you may know and trust, can recommend any good people or facilities. Look in the Yellow Pages of your telephone book under "Child Care Centers." Look in the classified ads of your local newspaper, or place an ad of your own. Put up notices on your church or synagogue bulletin board, in grocery stores, local community centers, or at the employment office of local colleges or universities. Look for notices that other

people have put up.

If you are looking for a family day care provider, a local licensing agency can provide you with local listings. Many communities have resource and referral agencies that help parents identify the options that best meet their needs.

Start looking early, particularly if you have a special program for your child in mind. Some programs have long waiting lists. Some may even require you to get on a waiting list before your child is born.

Gather information. If you are looking for a family day care provider or for a person to come into your home, interview the person at length and check references. Before you meet with them, develop a list of questions. If you are looking at day care centers, visit them - more than once, if possible. Just because a person or a program worked for someone else doesn't mean it's right for you. With any kind of child care, check references. No matter what kind of child care you are considering, look for caregivers who:

- Are kind and responsive. Good caregivers are affectionate, enjoy children, are energetic enough to keep up with your preschooler, patient, and mature enough to handle crises and conflicts.
- Have experience with preschoolers and like them. Find out how long they have worked with preschoolers, why they are in the early child care field, and whether they provide activities that are appropriate for your child's age. Observe the caregivers with children. Do the children seem happy? How do the caregivers respond to them?
- Recognize the individual needs of your child. Look for caregivers who are considerate

of different children's interests and needs and who can provide your child with enough attention.

- Share a child-rearing philosophy that is similar to yours. Find out what kind of discipline is used and how problems are handled.

Be certain that the child care facility is clean and safe and is filled with things to explore that are appropriate for your child's age.

Nancy Paulu has been a writer and editor for the U.S. Department of Education since 1986 and is the author of several books on education reform for the Department. Previously, she was an assistant editor of the *Harvard Education Letter* and a newspaper reporter in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Quincy, Massachusetts. She has also been a commentator and interviewer on public television. She received her bachelor's degree from Lawrence University and a master's degree in education from Harvard as a Bush Leadership Fellow. She lives with her husband and young daughter in Washington, DC.

Helping Your Child Learn to Read

Bernice Cullinan and Brod Bagert

When parents help their children learn to read, they help open the door to a new world. As a parent, you can begin an endless learning chain: You read to your children, they develop a love of stories and poems, they want to read on their own, they practice reading, and finally they read for their own information or pleasure. They become readers, and their world is forever expanded and enriched.

This book focuses primarily on what you can do to help children up to 10 years of age. During these years you can lay the foundation for your child to become a lifelong reader. In the first section, you will find some basic information about reading to your child. This is followed by suggestions that guide you to

- read with your child and make this all-important time together enjoyable;
- stimulate your child's interest in reading and language; and
- learn about your child's school reading programs and find ways to help.

While most of the book is for parents of children up to 10 years of age, there is a brief section for parents of older children on how to help them continue to grow as readers.

Finally, there is a resource section. As you make reading with your child a routine part of your lives, this section will help you to find new ideas and a variety of books you both might like.

You don't need to be an especially skillful reader yourself to help your child. In fact, some public libraries offer adult literacy programs that involve reading to children as a way to improve literacy skills for the whole family. Nor do you have to devote great amounts of time to reading with your child. It's the quality of time that counts. Just be consistent - give as much time as you can each day to help your child. The activities suggested are designed to fit into busy schedules.

Helping your child become a reader is an adventure you will not want to miss. The benefits to your child are immeasurable, and in the process you will find your world becoming richer as well.

THE BASICS

There is no more important activity for preparing your child to succeed as a reader than reading aloud together. Fill your story times with a variety of books. Be consistent, be patient, and watch the magic work.

Start Young and Stay With It

At just a few months of age, an infant can look at pictures, listen to your voice, and point to objects on cardboard pages. Guide your child by pointing to the pictures, and say the names of the various objects. By drawing attention to pictures and associating the words with both pictures and the real-world objects, your child will learn the importance of language.

Children learn to love the sound of language before they even notice the existence of printed words on a page. Reading books aloud to children stimulates their imagination and expands their understanding of the world. It helps them develop language and listening skills and prepares them to understand the written word. When the rhythm and melody of language become a

part of a child's life, learning to read will be as natural as learning to walk and talk.

Even after children learn to read by themselves, it's still important for you to read aloud together. By reading stories that are on their interest level, but beyond their reading level, you can stretch young readers' understanding and motivate them to improve their skills.

Advertise The Joy of Reading!

Our goal is to motivate children to want to read so they will practice reading independently and, thus, become fluent readers. That happens when children enjoy reading. We parents can do for reading what fast food chains do for hamburgers . . . ADVERTISE! And we advertise by reading great stories and poems to children.

We can help our children find the tools they need to succeed in life. Having access to information through the printed word is an absolute necessity. Knowledge is power, and books are full of it. But reading is more than just a practical tool. Through books we can enrich our minds; we can also relax and enjoy some precious leisure moments.

With your help, your children can begin a lifelong relationship with the printed word, so they grow into adults who read easily and frequently whether for business, knowledge, or pleasure.

Remember When You Were Very Young

Between the ages of 4 and 7, many children begin to recognize words on a page. In our society this may begin with recognition of a logo for a fast food chain or the brand name of a favorite cereal. But, before long, that special moment when a child holds a book

and starts to decode the mystery of written words is likely to occur.

You can help remove part of the mystery without worrying about a lot of theory. Just read the stories and poems and let them work their wonders. There is no better way to prepare your child for that moment when reading starts to "click," even if it's years down the road.

It will help, however, if we open our eyes to some things adult readers tend to take for granted. It's easier to be patient when we remember how much children do not know. Here are a few concepts we adults know so well we forget sometimes we ever learned them.

- There's a difference between words and pictures. Point to the print as you read aloud.
- Words on a page have meaning, and that is what we learn to read.
- Words go across the page from left to right. Follow with your finger as you read.
- Words on a page are made up of letters and are separated by a space.
- Each letter has at least two forms: one for capital letters and one for small letters.

These are examples of hieroglyphics.



Imagine how you would feel if you were trying to interpret a book full of such symbols. That's how young readers feel. But, a little

patience (maybe by turning it into a puzzle you can solve together) is certain to build confidence.

Home is Where The Heart Is

It's no secret that activities at home are an important supplement to the classroom, but there's more to it than that. There are things that parents can give children at home that the classrooms cannot give.

Children who are read to grow to love books. Over the years, these children will have good memories to treasure. They remember stories that made them laugh and stories that made them cry. They remember sharing these times with someone they love, and they anticipate with joy the time when they will be able to read for themselves.

By reading aloud together, by being examples, and by doing other activities, parents are in a unique position to help children enjoy reading and see the value of it.

IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW

It is important to keep fun in your parent-child reading and to let joy set the tone and pace. Here is a story to keep in mind:

Shamu is a performing whale, to the delight of many. However, she sometimes gets distracted and refuses to do her tricks. When that happens, her trainers stand around in dripping wetsuits and wait for her stubbornness to pass. They know that when a 5,000-pound whale decides she doesn't want to flip her tail on cue, there is very little anyone can do about it. But whales like to play, and sooner or later Shamu returns to the game of performing for her audience. Shamu's trainers know this

so they're always patient, they're always confident, and they always make performing fun.

While helping your child become a reader is certainly different from training a whale, the same qualities of patience, confidence, and playfulness in your approach will get results. If, from time to time, your child gets distracted and loses interest, take a break. Children love to learn. Give them a little breathing room, and their interest will always be renewed.

It's Part of Life

Although the life of a parent is often hectic, you should try to read with your child at least once a day at a regularly scheduled time. But don't be discouraged if you skip a day or don't always keep to your schedule. Just read to your child as often as you possibly can.

If you have more than one child, try to spend some time reading alone with each child, especially if they're more than 2 years apart. However, it's also fine to read to children at different stages and ages at the same time. Most children enjoy listening to many types of stories. When stories are complex, children can still get the idea and can be encouraged to ask questions. When stories are easy or familiar, youngsters enjoy these "old friends" and may even help in the reading. Taking the time to read with your children on a regular basis sends an important message: Reading is worthwhile.

One More Time

You may go through a period when your child favors one book and wants it read night after night. It is not unusual for children to favor a particular story, and this can be boring for parents. Keep in

mind, however, that a favorite story may speak to your child's interests or emotional needs. Be patient. Continue to expose your children to a wealth of books and eventually they will be ready for more stories.

Talking About Stories

It's often a good idea to talk about a story you are reading, but you need not feel compelled to talk about every story. Good stories will encourage a love for reading, with or without conversation. And sometimes children need time to think about stories they have read. A day or so later, don't be surprised if your child mentions something from a story you've read together.

The More The Merrier

From time to time, invite other adults or older children to listen in or join in reading aloud. The message is: Reading is for everybody. Enjoyment is essential in the process of helping your child become a reader.

READ ALONG

Children become readers when their parents read to them. It really is as simple as that. And here's the good news: It's easy to do and it's great fun. With a little practice you will be making the memories of a lifetime, memories both you and your child will cherish.

It is best to read to your child early and often. But it's never too late to begin. Start today.

With youngsters, remember that reading is a physical act, as well as a mental one. It involves hand-eye coordination. So, when you read, involve your child by:

- pointing out objects in the pictures;
- following the words with your

finger (so your child develops a sense that the words go from left to right on the page); and

- having your child help turn the pages (to learn that the pages turn from right to left).

Look For Books (Infant, Preschooler, Beginning Reader, Developing Reader)

The main thing is to find books you both love. They will shape your child's first impression of the world of reading.

Ask friends, neighbors, and teachers to share the names of their favorite books. Visit your local public library, and as early as possible, get your child a library card. Ask the librarian for help in selecting books. (Also see the resources section at the end of this book.). Look for award-winning books. Each year the American Library Association selects children's books for the Caldecott Medal for illustration and the Newbery Medal for writing. Check the book review sections of newspapers and magazines for recommended new children's books. As soon as they're old enough, have your children join you in browsing for books and making selections. If you and your child don't enjoy reading a particular book, put it aside and pick up another one.

Keep in mind your child's reading level and listening level are different. When you read easy books, beginning readers will soon be reading along with you. When you read more advanced books, you instill a love of stories, and you build the motivation that transforms children into lifelong readers.

Books and Babies (Infant up to 2 years)

Babies love to listen to the human voice. What better way than

through reading!

Start out by singing lullabies and folk songs to your baby. At around 6 months, look for books with brightly colored, simple pictures and lots of rhythm. (Mother Goose is perfect.) At around 9 months, include books that feature pictures and names of familiar objects. As you read, point out objects in the pictures and make sure your baby sees all the things that are fun to do with books. (Pat the Bunny by Dorothy Kunhardt is a classic touch-and-feel book for babies.) Vary the tone of your voice, sing nursery rhymes, bounce your knee, make funny faces, do whatever special effects you can to stimulate your baby's interest. Allow your child to touch and hold cloth and sturdy cardboard books. When reading to a baby, be brief but read often.

As you read to your baby, your child is forming an association between books and what is most loved - your voice and closeness. Allowing babies to handle books deepens their attachment even more.

R and R: Repetition and Rhyme (Preschooler, Beginning Reader)

Repetition makes books predictable, and young readers love knowing what comes next. Pick a story with repeated phrases or a poem you and your child like. Read slowly, and with a smile or a nod, let your children know you appreciate their participation. As children grow more familiar with the story, pause and give them the chance to "fill in the blanks." Encourage your children to pretend to read, especially books that contain repetition and rhyme. Most children who enjoy reading will eventually memorize all or parts of a book and imitate your reading.

When youngsters anticipate what's coming next in a story or

poem, they have a sense of mastery over books. When children feel power, they have courage to try. Pretending to read is an important step in the process of learning to read.

Poetry in Motion (Preschooler, Beginning Reader, Developing Reader)

When children act out a good poem, they love its rhyme and the pictures it paints with a few well-chosen words. They grow as readers by connecting emotion with the written word.

Read a poem slowly to your child, and bring all your dramatic talents to the reading. (In other words, ham it up.) If there is a poem your child is particularly fond of, suggest acting out a favorite line. Be sure to award such efforts with delighted enthusiasm. Then suggest acting out a verse, a stanza, or the entire poem. Ask your child to make a face of the way the character in the poem is feeling. Remember that facial expressions bring emotion into the performer's voice. Again, be an enthusiastic audience for your child. Applause is always nice. If your child is comfortable with the idea, look for a larger setting with an attentive, appreciative audience. Perhaps an after-dinner "recital" for family members would appeal to your child. Mistakes are a fact of life, so ignore them.

Poems are often short with lots of white space on the page. This makes them manageable for new readers and helps to build their confidence.

Read to Me (Beginning Reader, Developing Reader)

It's important to read to your children, but equally important to listen to them read to you. Children thrive on having someone ap-

preciate their developing skills.

Listen attentively as your child reads. Take turns. You read a paragraph and have your child read the next one. As your child becomes more at ease with reading aloud, take turns reading a full page. Keep in mind that your child may be focusing on how to read, and your reading helps to keep the story alive. If your children have trouble reading words, you can help in several ways:

- tell them to skip over the word, read the rest of the sentence, and ask what word would make sense in the story;
- help them use what they know about letters and sounds;
- supply the correct word.

Tell children how proud you are of their efforts and skills. Listening to your children read aloud provides opportunities for you to express appreciation of their new skills and for them to practice their reading. Most importantly, it's another way to enjoy reading together.

Family Reading Time (Beginning Reader, Developing Reader)

A quiet time for family members to read on their own may be the only chance a busy parent gets to read the paper.

Both you and your child should pick out something to read. Don't be concerned if your beginning readers pick materials that are easier than their school reading books. Practice with easy books (and the comics) will improve their fluency. If you subscribe to a children's magazine, this is a good time to get it out. There are many good children's magazines, and youngsters often get a special thrill out of receiving their own mail. Relax and enjoy while you each

read your own selections.

A family reading time shows that you like to read. Because you value reading, your children will too.

Story Talk (Preschooler, Beginning Reader, Developing Reader)

Talking about what you read is another way to help children develop language and thinking skills. You don't need to plan the talk, discuss every story, or expect an answer.

Read slowly and pause occasionally to think out loud about a story. You can speculate: "I wonder what's going to happen next!" Or ask a question: "Do you know what a palace is?" Or point out: "Look where the little mouse is now." Answer your children's questions, and if you think they don't understand something, stop and ask them. Don't worry if you break into the flow of a story to make something clear. Read the name of the book's author and illustrator and make sure your children understand what they do.

Talking about stories they read helps children develop their vocabularies, link stories to everyday sense out of stories.

WRITE AND TALK, TOO

While reading with your child is most important, there are other activities that help to get children ready to read. With a solid foundation, your child will not only read, but will read with enthusiasm.

Learning to read is part of learning language. It's like a little leaguer learning to hit a baseball. The young hitter must learn to watch the ball when it is pitched, to step into it, and to swing the bat to make the hit. It's a single event

made up of three acts. Baseball players learn to do all three at once.

The same is true of learning language. When we use language, we speak words out loud, we read words on paper, and we write. This section has activities that encourage your child to:

- speak;
- read;
- write;
- listen.

Begin long before you expect your child to actually read, and continue long after your child is an independent reader.

Now, turn the page and start enjoying language.

Tot Talk (Infant, Preschooler)

What's "old hat" to you can be new and exciting to preschoolers. When you talk about everyday experiences, you help children connect their world to language and enable them to go beyond that world to new ideas.

As you get dinner ready, talk to your child about things that are happening. When your 2- or 3-year-old "helps" by taking out all the pots and pans, talk about them. Which one is the biggest? Can you find a lid for that one? What color is this one? When walking down the street and your toddler stops to collect leaves, stop and ask questions that require more than a "yes" or "no" answer. Which leaves are the same? Which are different? What else grows on trees? Ask "what if" questions. What would happen if we didn't shovel the snow? What if that butterfly lands on your nose? Answer your children's endless "why" questions patiently. When you say, "I don't know, let's look it up" you show how important books are as resources for answering questions.

After your preschooler tells you a story, ask questions so you can understand better. That way children learn how to tell complete stories and know you are interested in what they have to say. Expose your children to varied experiences - trips to the library, museum, or zoo; walks in the park; or visits with friends and relatives. Surround these events with lots of comments, questions, and answers.

Talking enables children to expand their vocabulary and understanding of the world. The ability to carry on a conversation is important for reading development. Remember, it is better to talk too much than too little with a small child.

What's in A Name? (Infant up to 2 years, Preschooler)

Use your child's name to develop an interest in the world of print.

Print the letters of your child's name on paper. Say each letter as you write it, "K...A...T...I...E" or "M...I...K...E." When you finish, say, "That's your name!" Have your child draw a picture. When finished, say, "I have an idea! Let's put your name on your picture." As you write the letters, say them out loud. If you have magnetic letters, spell out your child's name on the refrigerator door. Print your child's name on a card and put it on the door of your child's room or special place.

It's hard to overemphasize the importance of writing and displaying your child's name.

World of Words (Preschooler, Beginning Reader, Developing Reader)

Here are a few words to create a home rich in words:

Hang posters of the alphabet on

bedroom walls or make an alphabet poster with your child. Label the things in your child's pictures. If your child draws a picture of a house, label it "house" and put it on the refrigerator. Have your child watch you write when you make shopping or to-do lists. Say the words out loud and carefully print each letter. Let your child make lists, too. Help your child form the letters and spell the words. Look at newspapers and magazines with your child. Find an interesting picture and show it to your child as you read the caption out loud. Create a scrapbook. Cut out pictures of people and places and label them.

By exposing your child to words and letters often, your child will begin to recognize the shapes of letters. The world of words will become friendly.

Book Nooks (Infant, Preschooler, Beginning Reader, Developing Reader)

With very little effort, parents can introduce children to the wide world of books.

Visit the library. Get a library card in your child's name and one for yourself if you don't have one. Go to the children's section and spend time reading and selecting books to take home. Check out books yourself to show your child everyone can use and enjoy books and the library. Be sure to introduce your child to the librarian and ask about special programs the library has for children. Start your own home library. Designate a book case or shelf especially for your child. Encourage your child to arrange the books by some method - books about animals, holiday books, favorite books. Keep an eye out for inexpensive books at flea markets, garage sales, used book stores, and discount tables at

book stores. Many public libraries sell old books once a year. You will find some real bargains! Make your own books. (See activity under Make a Book.) Child-made books become lasting treasures and part of your home library.

When collecting books in an important family activity, parents send the message that books are important and fun.

Family Stories (Preschooler, Beginning Reader, Developing Reader)

Family stories enrich the relationship between parent and child. Tell your child stories about your parents and grandparents. You might even put these stories in a book and add old family photographs. Have your child tell you stories about what happened on special days, such as holidays, birthdays, and family vacations. Reminisce about when you were little. Describe things that happened at school involving teachers and subjects you were studying. Talk about your brothers, sisters, or friends. Write a trip journal with your child to create a new family story. Recording the day's special event and pasting the photograph into the journal ties the family story to a written record. You can also include everyday trips like going to the market or the park.

It helps for children to know that stories come from real people and are about real events. When children listen to stories, they hear the voice of the storyteller. This helps them hear the words they learn to read aloud or read silently.

Now Hear This (Preschooler, Beginning Reader, Developing Reader)

Children are great mimics. When you tell stories, your child

will begin to tell stories, too.

Have your child tell stories like those you have told. Ask: "And then what happened?" to urge the story along. Listen closely when your child speaks. Be enthusiastic and responsive. If you don't understand some part of the story, take the time to get your child to explain. This will help your child understand the relationship between a speaker and a listener and an author and a reader. Encourage your child to express himself or herself. This will help your child develop a wide vocabulary. It can also help with pronouncing words clearly.

Having a good audience is very helpful for a child to improve language skills, as well as poise in speaking. Parents can be the best audience a child will ever have.

P.S. I Love You (Preschooler, Beginning Reader, Developing Reader)

Something important happens when children receive and write letters. They realize that the printed word has a purpose.

Send your child little notes (by putting them in a pocket or lunch box, for example). When your child shows you the note, read it out loud with expression. Some children will read the notes on their own. When your child expresses a feeling or thought that's related to a person, have your child write a letter. Have your child dictate the words to you if your child doesn't write yet. Ask the people who receive these notes to respond. An oral response is fine - a written response is even better. Explain the writing process to your child: "We think of ideas and put them into words; we put the words on paper; people read the words; and people respond."

Language is speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Each ele-

PARENTS AND THE SCHOOLS

Success in school depends, in large part, on your child's ability to read, and your role in helping your child become a reader extends into the classroom. The kind of support you provide will, of course, change as your child grows older. Your involvement and monitoring your child's progress in school can help your child become a better reader.

Involvement in school programs can take many forms, from attending PTA meetings to volunteering in school activities. Through action, not just words, you demonstrate to your child that school is important.

In monitoring your child's progress in learning to read, you need to look at both the programs offered at school and your child's performance. Below is a checklist for different levels of schooling. There is much more information available to help you evaluate school reading programs.

Kindergarten

- Do teachers frequently read aloud?
- Are favorite stories read over and over again and is "pretend" reading encouraged?
- Are there story discussions with opportunities for children to talk and listen?
- Are there good materials available for children to read and have read to them?
- Do teachers discuss with children the different purposes of reading?
- Do children have opportunities to write? Do they compose messages to other people?

Beginning Reading Programs

When children start school, they receive their first formal instruction in reading. At this stage, they learn to identify words - by translating groups of letters into spoken words.

- Does the program include teaching the relationship between letters and

sounds (phonics)?

- Are children reading stories that encourage them to practice what they are learning?
- Are children's reading materials interesting? Do they accommodate a child's limited reading vocabulary and the need to practice word identification with exciting stories?
- Are teachers still reading stories aloud to children and including good children's literature?

Developmental Reading Programs

- Do reading and writing activities occur in every classroom and in every subject studied? As you walk through the school, do you see displays of children's writing on bulletin boards?
- Are teachers providing direct instruction - teaching strategies that help students become better readers?
- Are there plenty of opportunities for children to practice reading? (For third and fourth graders, this should include at least two hours a week of independent reading in school.)
- Are there well-stocked school or classroom libraries? (Schools may enrich their collections by borrowing from a local public library.)
- Are children encouraged to write meaningfully about what they read? It is not enough to fill in the blanks on worksheets; the point is to have children think about what they read, relate it to what they already know, and communicate these thoughts to others.

Evaluating Your Child's Progress

It is important to monitor your child's progress through reports from the teacher. Also, it is important to attend school open houses or similar

events where teachers are available to explain the program and discuss children's progress with their parents.

If you think your child should be doing better, consider meeting privately with the teacher. In most cases, the teacher and principal will be able to shed light on your child's progress and what you might do to help. Your school system may have access to special resources such as a reading specialist and guidance counselor or to materials to address your child's needs.

You may want additional help for your child. A good starting point is the nearest college or university. Most have reading tutorial services that are available on a sliding-fee scale. If not, there may be faculty or graduate students interested in tutoring. Then monitor your child's progress the same way you would his progress in school. If you do not see a difference in performance in 6 to 8 weeks, discuss the program with your child's tutor. Can the tutor explain the goals of the program and document your child's progress? If not, you may wish to consider another course of action.

Some children struggle with reading problems where the cause is readily identifiable. Some of the more widely recognized causes of reading problems are vision and hearing impairments and poor speech and language development. But there are other school children who have problems reading because of a learning disability. Whatever the cause or nature of a child's reading problem, the earlier the difficulty is discovered and additional help provided, the better the child's chances are of becoming a successful reader.

The good news is that no matter how long it takes, with few exceptions, children can learn to read. One of the most important roles you can play in relation to your children's schoolwork is that of cheerleader. Applaud their efforts and their successes. Help them have the courage to keep trying.

ments supports and enriches the other. Sending letters will help children become writers, and writing will make them better readers.

Easy as Pie (Beginning Reader, Developing Reader)

Preparing meals is another good way for children to practice language skills.

Ask children to help you prepare a grocery list. Take them to the market and have them find items on the list. Have them help put away the groceries and encourage them to read the labels, box tops, and packages as they store them. Have them read the ingredients from a recipe. Prepare a meal together and let them take needed items from shelves and storage areas. Talk about the steps in preparing a meal - first, second, and so on. Praise the efforts of your early reader and encourage other family members to do the same.

The purpose of reading is to get meaning from the page. By using reading skills to prepare a meal, children see positive results from reading.

Write On (Preschooler, Beginning Reader, Developing Reader)

Writing helps a child become a better reader, and reading helps a child become a better writer.

Ask your preschooler to dictate a story to you. It could include descriptions of your outings and activities, along with mementos such as fall leaves, birthday cards, and photographs. Older children can do these activities on their own. Use a chalkboard or a family message board as an exciting way to involve children in writing with a purpose. Keep supplies of paper, pencils, markers, and the like within easy reach. Encourage be-

ginning and developing writers to keep journals and write stories. Ask questions that will help children organize the stories, and respond to their questions about letters and spelling. Suggest they share the activity with a smaller brother, sister, or friend. Respond to the content of children's writing, and don't be overly concerned with misspellings. Over time you can help your child concentrate on learning to spell correctly.

When children begin to write, they run the risk of criticism, and it takes courage to continue. Our job as parents is to help children find the courage. This we can do by expressing our appreciation of their efforts.

TV (Preschooler, Beginning Reader, Developing Reader)

Television can be a great tool for education too. The keys are setting limits, making good choices, taking time to watch together, discussing what you view, and encouraging follow-up reading.

What To Do

1. Limit your child's television viewing time and make your rules and reasons clear. Involve your child in choosing which programs to watch. Read the TV schedule together to choose.
2. Monitor what your child is watching, and whenever possible, watch the programs with your child.
3. When you watch shows with your child, discuss what you have seen so your child can better understand the programs.
4. Look for programs that will stimulate your child's interests and encourage reading (such as dramatizations of children's literature and programs on wildlife, natural history, and science).

Many experts recommend that children watch no more than 10 hours of television each week. Limiting television viewing frees up time for reading and writing activities.

It is worth noting that captioned television shows can be especially helpful with children who are deaf and hard of hearing, studying English as a second language, or having difficulty learning to read.

Make A Book (Preschooler, Beginning Reader, Developing Reader)

Turn your child's writing into a homemade book. The effect will be powerful. Suddenly books become a lot more human and understandable.

What To Do

1. Paste pages of your child's writings onto pieces of construction paper.
2. Discuss the order the writings should go in. Should all the writings about animals go in one section and the writings about holidays in another? Which writings are the most important and where should they be placed in the book?
3. Number the pages.
4. Make a table of contents.
5. Make covers for the book with heavy paper or cardboard. You might want to paste colorful cloth or wrapping paper onto the covers.
6. Punch holes in the pages and the covers.
7. Bind the book together by lacing the yarn or ribbon through the holes. Make knots in the loose ends or tie them in a bow, so that the yarn or ribbon won't slip out.
8. Add pages to this book as more writings are completed or start a new book.

Making books is a multi-step process from planning to writing to producing a final product.

Make Your Own Dictionary (Preschooler, Beginning Reader)

A letter dictionary is a long-term project.

What You'll Need

Notebook; Pencil, pen, crayons, or markers; Old magazines; Safety scissors; Paste

What To Do

1. Help your child head every page or two with a letter of the alphabet.
2. Cut out pictures of things from old magazines that start with the letters and paste them on the appropriate pages.
3. Help your child label the pictures.

If it stops being fun, you can come back to the project at a later time. When you come back to it, don't worry if your child forgets something. That's the nature of young children.

A POSTSCRIPT ABOUT OLDER CHILDREN

You can't put a teenager on your lap and read stories every night. But you can still help older children become enthusiastic and fluent readers by adapting many of the same principles that work with the little ones. It is especially important to continue the following efforts:

- Encourage reading for the fun of it and as a free-time activity.
- Create an environment rich with books.
- Talk and listen to your children. Language is like a four-legged stool: Speaking, listening, reading, and writing are its parts,

and each supports the other.

- Read with your children every chance you get - even if it's just part of a newspaper article at the breakfast table.
- Encourage children to write by responding to the ideas they try to communicate in writing.
- Set the example - put a book in your hands and be sure your children know that you read for enjoyment and to get needed information.
- Monitor your children's schoolwork and applaud their efforts.

[The original book provides a list of resources for children and parents. Ed.]

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Help Your Child Learn to Write Well

*U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement*

Should you help your child with writing? Yes, if you want your child to:

- Do well in school
- Enjoy self-expression
- Become more self-reliant

You know how important writing will be to your child's life. It will be important from first-grade through college and throughout adulthood.

Writing is:

PRACTICAL. Most of us make lists, jot down reminders, and write notes and instructions at least occasionally.

JOB-RELATED. Professional and white-collar workers write frequently - preparing memos, letters, briefing papers, sales reports, articles, research reports, proposals, and the like. Most workers do

"some" writing on the job.

STIMULATING. Writing helps to provoke thoughts and to organize them logically and concisely.

SOCIAL. Most of us write thank-you notes and letters to friends at least now and then.

THERAPEUTIC. It can be helpful to express feelings in writing that cannot be expressed so easily by speaking.

Unfortunately, "many schools are unable to give children sufficient instruction in writing." There are various reasons: teachers aren't trained to teach writing skills, writing classes may be too large, it's often difficult to measure writing skills, etc.

Study after study shows that students' writing lacks clarity, coherence, and organization. Only a few students can write persuasive essays or competent business letters. As many as one out of four have

serious writing difficulties. And students say they like writing less and less as they go through school.

That's why the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) suggests that you help your child with writing. OERI believes you, a parent, can make a big difference. You can use helping strategies that are simple and fun. You can use them to help your child learn to write well - and to enjoy doing it! This article tells you how.

THINGS TO KNOW

Writing is more than putting words on paper. It's a final stage in the complex process of communicating that begins with "thinking." Writing is an especially important stage in communication, the intent being to leave no room for doubt. Has any country ratified a verbal treaty?

One of the first means of com-

Writing is more than putting words on paper. It's a final stage in the complex process of communicating that begins with "thinking."

munication for your child is through drawing. Do encourage the child to draw and to discuss his/her drawings. Ask questions: What is the boy doing? Does the house look like ours? Can you tell a story about this picture?

Most children's basic speech patterns are formed by the time they enter school. By that time children speak clearly, recognize most letters of the alphabet, and may try to write. Show an interest in, and ask questions about, the things your child says, draws, and may try to write.

Writing well requires:

- **CLEAR THINKING.** Sometimes the child needs to have his/her memory refreshed about a past event in order to write about it.
- **SUFFICIENT TIME.** Children may have 'stories in their heads' but need time to think them through and write them down. School class periods are often not long enough.
- **READING.** Reading can stimulate a child to write about his/her own family or school life. If your child reads good books, (s)he will be a better writer.
- **A MEANINGFUL TASK.** A child needs meaningful, not artificial writing tasks. You'll find suggestions for such tasks in the section, "Things To Do."
- **INTEREST.** All the time in the world won't help if there is nothing to write, nothing to say. Some of the reasons for writing include: sending messages, keeping records, expressing feelings, or relaying information.
- **PRACTICE.** And more practice.
- **REVISING.** Students need experience in revising their work - i.e., seeing what they can do to

make it clearer, more descriptive, more concise, etc.

POINTERS FOR PARENTS

In helping your child to learn to write well, remember that your goal is to make writing easier and more enjoyable.

PROVIDE A PLACE. It's important for a child to have a good place to write - a desk or table with a smooth, flat surface and good lighting.

HAVE THE MATERIALS. Provide plenty of paper - lined and unlined - and things to write with, including pencils, pens, and crayons.

ALLOW TIME. Help your child spend time thinking about a writing project or exercise. Good writers do a great deal of thinking. Your child may dawdle, sharpen a pencil, get papers ready, or look up the spelling of a word. Be patient - your child may be thinking.

RESPOND. Do respond to the ideas your child expresses verbally or in writing. Make it clear that you are interested in the true function of writing which is to convey ideas. This means focusing on "what" the child has written, not "how" it was written. It's usually wise to ignore minor errors, particularly at the stage when your child is just getting ideas together. **DON'T YOU WRITE IT!** Don't write a paper for your child that will be turned in as his/her work. Never rewrite a child's work. Meeting a writing deadline, taking responsibility for the finished product, and feeling ownership of it are important parts of writing well.

PRAISE. Take a positive approach and say something good about your child's writing. Is it accurate? Descriptive? Thoughtful? Interesting? Does it say something?

In helping your child to learn to write well, remember that your goal is to make writing easier and more enjoyable.

THINGS TO DO

MAKE IT REAL. Your child needs to do real writing. It's more important for the child to write a letter to a relative than it is to write a one-line note on a greeting card. Encourage the child to write to relatives and friends. Perhaps your child would enjoy corresponding with a pen pal.

SUGGEST NOTE-TAKING. Encourage your child to take notes on trips or outings and to describe what (s)he saw. This could include a description of nature walks, a boat ride, a car trip, or other events that lend themselves to note-taking.

BRAINSTORM. Talk with your child as much as possible about his/her impressions and encourage the child to describe people and events to you. If the child's description is especially accurate and colorful, say so.

ENCOURAGE KEEPING A JOURNAL. This is excellent writing practice as well as a good outlet for venting feelings. Encourage your child to write about things that happen at home and school, about people (s)he likes or dislikes and why, things to remember or things the child wants to do. Especially encourage your child to write about personal feelings - pleasures as well as disappointments. If the child wants to share the journal with you, read the entries and discuss them - especially the child's ideas and perceptions.

WRITE TOGETHER. Have your child help you with letters, even such routine ones as ordering items from an advertisement or writing to a business firm. This helps the child to see firsthand that writing is important to adults and truly useful.

USE GAMES. There are numerous games and puzzles that help a child to increase vocabulary and make the child more fluent in

speaking and writing. Remember, building a vocabulary builds confidence. Try crossword puzzles, word games, anagrams and cryptograms designed especially for children. Flash cards are good, too, and they're easy to make at home.

SUGGEST MAKING LISTS. Most children like to make lists just as they like to count. Encourage this. Making lists is good practice and helps a child to become more organized. Boys and girls might make lists of their records, tapes, baseball cards, dolls, furniture in a room, etc. They could include items they want. It's also good practice to make lists of things to do, schoolwork, dates for tests, social events, and other reminders.

ENCOURAGE COPYING. If a child likes a particular song, suggest learning the words by writing them down - replaying the song on your stereo/tape player or jotting down the words whenever the song is played on a radio program. Also encourage copying favorite poems or quotations from books and plays.

OERI's strategies for helping children learn to write well are helping youngsters throughout the country. We hope they will help your child.

Help Your Child Improve in Test-taking

*U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement*

TEST. It's a loaded word. Important...something to care about...something that can mean so much we get apprehensive thinking about it.

Tests are important, especially to school children. A test may measure a basic skill. It can affect a year's grade. Or, if it measures the ability to learn, it can affect a child's placement in school. So it's important to do well on tests.

Besides, the ability to do well on tests can help throughout life in such things as getting a driver's license, trying out for sports, or getting a job. Without this ability, a person can be severely handicapped.

Your child can develop this ability. And you can help the child do it. Just try the simple techniques developed through Office of Edu-

cational Research and Improvement (OERI) research. This article tells you how.

WHY TEST?

It's helpful for a child to understand why schools give tests. And to know the different kinds of tests.

Tests are yardsticks. Schools use them to measure, and then improve education. Some tell schools that they need to strengthen courses or change teaching techniques. Other tests compare students by schools, school districts, or cities. All tests determine how well "your child" is doing. And that's very important.

Most of the tests your child will take are "teacher-made." That is, teachers design them. These tests are associated with the grades on

report cards. They help measure a student's progress - telling the teacher and the student whether he or she is keeping up with the class, needs extra help, or, perhaps, is far ahead of other students.

Now and then your child will take "standardized" tests. These use the same standards to measure student performance across the country. Everyone takes the same test according to the same rules. This makes it possible to measure each student's performance against that of others. The group with whom a student's performance is compared is a "norm group" and consists of many students of the same age or grade who took the same test.

ASK THE SCHOOL

It could be useful for you to

know the school's policies and practices on giving standardized tests and the use of test scores. Ask your child's teacher or guidance counselor about the kinds of tests your child will take during the year - and the schedule for testing.

One other thing: some schools give students practice in taking tests. This helps to make sure that they are familiar with directions and test format. Find out whether your child's school gives "test-taking practice" on a regular basis or will provide such practice if your child needs it.

AVOID TEST ANXIETY

It's good to be concerned about taking a test. It's not good to get "test anxiety." This is excessive worry about doing well on a test and it can mean disaster for a student.

Students who suffer from test anxiety tend to worry about success in school, especially doing well on tests. They worry about the future, and are extremely self-critical. Instead of feeling challenged by the prospect of success, they become afraid of failure. This makes them anxious about tests and their own abilities. Ultimately, they become so worked up that they feel incompetent about the subject matter or the test.

It does not help to tell the child to relax, to think about something else, or stop worrying. But there are ways to reduce test anxiety. Encourage your child to do these things:

- Space studying over days or weeks. (Real learning occurs through studying that takes place over a period of time.) Understand the information and relate it to what is already known. Review it more than once. (By doing this, the student should

feel prepared at exam time.)

- Don't "cram" the night before - cramming increases anxiety which interferes with clear thinking. Get a good night's sleep. Rest, exercise, and eating well are as important to test-taking as they are to other schoolwork.
- Read the directions carefully when the teacher hands out the test. If you don't understand them, ask the teacher to explain.
- Look quickly at the entire examination to see what types of questions are included (multiple choice, matching, true/false, essay) and, if possible, the number of points for each. This will help you pace yourself.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, skip it and go on. Don't waste time worrying about it. Mark it so you can identify it as unanswered. If you have time at the end of the exam, return to the unanswered question(s).

DO'S AND DON'T'S

You can be a great help to your children if you will observe these do's and don't's about tests and testing:

- Don't be too anxious about a child's test scores. If you put too much emphasis on test scores, this can upset a child.
- Do encourage children. Praise them for the things they do well. If they feel good about themselves, they will do their best. Children who are afraid of failing are more likely to become anxious when taking tests and more likely to make mistakes.
- Don't judge a child on the basis of a single test score. Test scores are not perfect measures of what a child can do. There are many other things that might influence

Tests are yardsticks. Schools use them to measure, and then improve education.

a test score. For example, a child can be affected by the way he or she is feeling, the setting in the classroom, and the attitude of the teacher. Remember, also, that one test is simply one test.

- Meet with your child's teacher as often as possible to discuss his/her progress. Ask the teacher to suggest activities for you and your child to do at home to help prepare for tests and improve your child's understanding of schoolwork. Parents and teachers should work together to benefit students.
- Make sure your child attends school regularly. Remember, tests do reflect children's overall achievement. The more effort and energy a child puts into learning, the more likely he/she will do well on tests.
- Provide a quiet, comfortable place for studying at home.
- Make sure that your child is well rested on school days and especially the day of a test. Children who are tired are less able to pay attention in class or to handle the demands of a test.
- Give your child a well rounded diet. A healthy body leads to a healthy, active mind. Most schools provide free breakfast and lunch for economically disadvantaged students. If you believe your child qualifies, talk to the school principal.
- Provide books and magazines for your youngster to read at home. By reading new materials, a child will learn new words that might appear on a test. Ask your child's school about a suggested outside reading list or get suggestions from the public library.

AFTER THE TEST

It's important for children to review test results. This is especially true when they take teacher-made tests. They can learn from a graded exam paper. It will show where they had difficulty and, perhaps, why. This is especially important for classes where the material builds from one section to the next, as in math. Students who have not mastered the basics of math will be unable to work with fractions, square roots, beginning algebra, and so on.

Discuss the wrong answers with your children and find out why they answered as they did. Sometimes a child misunderstands the way a question is worded or misinterprets what was asked. The child may have known the correct answer but failed to express it effectively.

It's important, too, for children to see how well they used their time on the test and whether guessing was a good idea. This helps them to change what they do on the next test, if necessary.

You and the child should read and discuss all comments written by the teacher. If there are any comments that aren't clear, the child should ask the teacher to explain.

Don't "cram" the night before - cramming increases anxiety which interferes with clear thinking.

Helping Your Child Use the Library

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement

When I was a youngster, I remember seeing, in my mind's eye, the whole world spread out before me. One fine day I escaped from my dull town, and with two boys of my own age, Andre and Julien, traveled all over France through the pages of a beautiful book. Another time, led by Don Quixote and Sancho, I saw the plains of Castile, white-hot in the sun, with dusty roads and inns full of adventure. In my imagination I saw desert isles, the northern lights on the sea. I visited the pigmy country in Africa, which did not seem strange to me as I was familiar with Lilliput. I lived in Uncle Tom's Cabin and cultivated sugar cane with black slaves as companions. Like Baron Munchausen, I fastened a rope to the crescent moon so I could glide to earth, and the rope being too short I cut it above me to attach it to the end which was hanging under my feet. I went everywhere with Jules Verne, even to the very bot-

tom of the ocean.

And so it comes about that in our first impressionable years the universal republic of childhood is born. The only rivalry in those days was in the color and picturesque quality. Beautiful stories grew to completion, doing no harm to one another, mingling harmoniously. All was peace and unity.

Paul Hazard

from Books, Children and Men (Copyright by The Horn Book, Inc., 1944, renewed 1972. Quoted with permission.)

You don't have to have a house overflowing with books to give your children this kind of experience. Your local public library is home to an abundance of books, plus many other valuable resources.

One of the most exciting and innovative areas in the library today is the children's section. Most public libraries now offer a wide variety of children's books and magazines. Some even offer se-

lected materials in foreign languages (most often Spanish, French, and some Asian languages). Usually there is a children's librarian specially trained to help find just the right book whether it's Mother Goose or how to do a science project. In addition to printed materials, libraries often lend audio- and videocassettes of children's books and movies. They may sponsor special programs, including story hours for youngsters (from toddlers on up), summer reading programs, and homework help. Many libraries also provide valuable resources for teenagers, such as term paper - clinics - and information and referral services. Keep in mind too that a visit to the library can help enrich your life as an adult. Whether you are seeking information or just a good read, your local public library has a lot to offer.

Getting Children Interested

HELPING YOUR CHILDREN TO ENJOY READING IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS YOU CAN DO AS A

PARENT and well worth the investment of your time and energy. Kids will learn reading skills in school, but often they come to associate reading with work, not pleasure. As a result, they lose their desire to read. And it is that desire - the curiosity and interest - that is the cornerstone to using reading and related skills successfully. By far the most effective way to encourage your children to love books and reading is to read aloud to them, and the earlier you start, the better. Even a baby of a few months can see pictures, listen to your voice, and turn cardboard pages. Make this time together a special time when you hold your kids and share the pleasure of a story without the distractions of TV or telephones. You may be surprised to find that a well-written children's book is often as big a delight to you as it is to the kids.

And don't stop taking the time to read aloud once your children have learned to read for themselves. At this stage, ENCOURAGE THEM TO READ TO YOU some of the time. This shared enjoyment will continue to strengthen your children's interest and appreciation.

Simply having books, magazines, and newspapers around your home will help children to view them as part of daily life. And your example of reading frequently and enjoying it will reinforce that view.

While your children are still very small, it's a good idea to start a HOME LIBRARY for them, even if it's just a shelf or two. Be sure to keep some books for little children to handle freely. Consider specially made, extra durable books for infants, and pick paperbacks and plastic covers for kids who are older but still not quite ready for expensive hardbacks. Allowing little children to touch, smell, and even taste books will help them to

develop strong attachments.

How you handle books will eventually influence how your kids treat them. Children imitate, so if they SEE THAT YOU ENJOY READING and treat books gently and with respect, it is likely that they will do the same.

When you read aloud together, CHOOSE BOOKS THAT YOU BOTH LIKE. If a book seems dull, put it down and find one that is appealing. There are, however, so many children's books in print that making the best selections may seem a formidable task. One approach is to LOOK FOR AWARD-WINNING BOOKS. There are two famous awards for children's literature made each year by the American Library Association that are good indicators of quality work: the Caldecott Medal for illustration and the Newberry Medal for writing. But these are given to only two of the approximately 2,500 new children's books published each year.

Fortunately, there is a lot of other good help available. For instance, there are lists of books recommended by the American Library Association and the Library of Congress and some excellent books to guide parents in making selections (see For More Information).

The best help of all, though, is at your neighborhood library. If you are not familiar with the library, DON'T HESITATE TO ASK FOR HELP. The children's librarian is trained to help you locate specific books, books that are good for reading aloud, and books on a particular subject recommended for a particular age group. The library also has many book lists, including ones like those mentioned above and probably some published by the library itself.

In addition, your library will

have several journals that regularly review children's books, including THE HORN BOOK and BOOKLIST. These will give you an idea of what's new and worth pursuing. And there's nothing like just browsing through the many books available at your library until you find ones that appeal to you and your kids.

If your children are school-aged, keep in mind that the school library is an excellent source for a wide variety of materials and the school librarian is knowledgeable about children's literature. Encourage your kids to bring home books from their school library for pleasure as well as for their studies.

When You Visit the Library

As soon as you can, it is a good idea to INCLUDE CHILDREN - EVEN TODDLERS - IN WEEKLY TRIPS TO THE LIBRARY. Libraries are often open in the evening for working parents, and most will issue a library card to any children who can print their names and whose parent will countersign for them. See that your children get THEIR OWN LIBRARY CARDS as soon as possible so that they can check out their own books.

Also, it's a good idea to ENCOURAGE YOUR KIDS TO ASK on their own for help in finding books and materials. Keep in mind, however, that a librarian is there to point out different choices, not to decide what ideas your children should be exposed to. That is your job. So, no matter how helpful or knowledgeable a children's librarian may be, your participation in selecting and sharing books with your child is very important.

Although public libraries welcome children and may have special facilities for them, there are commonsense guidelines for behavior that parents need to stress:

- Library books are everybody's property and should be treated carefully.
- Be sure that you and your children know the library's policies regarding loan periods and fines for overdue books.
- Explain to your kids that the library is there for the whole community and they need to be considerate of others' needs.

Keep in mind that it is your responsibility to see that your children behave acceptably and are not disruptive to others using the library.

When Your Child Visits the Library Alone

Recently public libraries have seen a dramatic increase in the number of "latchkey kids" - elementary and even preschool-aged children left unattended. Frequently, working parents are instructing their youngsters to go to the library after school and do homework until they can pick them up several hours later. This trend has produced some unfortunate results. For instance, children have been left in unsafe areas at closing time when their parents were late in picking them up. In addition, leaving children unattended at public libraries for long periods can be disruptive for other patrons. Kids who were hungry, tired, or restless have gotten noisy, upset, and have even vandalized library property.

Consequently, many public libraries have adopted policies regarding how they will respond to children who are left unsupervised for long periods, particularly when there are questions of safety or liability. The policies of different libraries vary considerably, so if you have any questions, be sure to ask

a staff member at your library.

Preschool children visiting a library should always be accompanied by an adult or teenager. Suggestions for parents of older children who will be visiting the library include:

- Remember that the library is a public building. Librarians are busy and are not able to supervise kids.
- Teach your children how to take care of themselves in public places, including how to deal with strangers, what situations are dangerous, and what to do if they feel threatened.
- Assess whether your children are comfortable being at the library for long periods. If going directly from school, do they need something to eat or some kind of physical or social outlet first?
- Instruct your children on how to be considerate of others using the library.
- Always pick up your children at least 30 minutes before closing time. In case you are delayed, give your children an alternative plan, such as calling a neighbor for a ride home.

All of these guidelines and policies are designed to protect children, not discourage them from visiting libraries. Kids are welcome.

Library Services

So what exactly can you expect if you take your children to the library? A lot depends, of course, on their ages. And a lot depends on your local public library's resources. The best way to find out is to visit your community library and see what's available. While there is much variety in local library programs throughout the

country, there are several elements common to most children's services, as well as some general trends.

For Preschoolers

Until recently, libraries offered little or nothing for children below the age of 3. But in the last few years, many libraries have introduced programs for INFANTS.

"Catch 'Em in the Cradle," a popular program that originated in Florida, is one such effort, and libraries throughout the country are copying it. New parents receive library information kits through hospitals, adoption centers, and even prenatal classes. These kits generally contain information on how to stimulate a baby's language development through games, songs, and other activities. They also include lists of books for babies, books on parenting, and, of course, the address and hours of the local library. If there is no such program in your

Helping your children to enjoy reading is one of the most important things you can do as a parent and well worth the investment of your time and energy.

area and you'd like an information kit, ask the librarian at your local public library for help in putting one together.

Some libraries invite parents to bring in their children no matter how young for special programs, such as parent-child story hours in the evening. Here parents can learn fingerplays, songs, rhymes, and other activities they can use at home to entertain and stimulate their infants.

More and more libraries are instituting programs designed FOR TODDLERS 18 TO 36 MONTHS OLD. Again, parents and children participate in activities that may include reading aloud, storytelling, fingerplays, rhymes, and songs. Because this age is a crucial time in the development of language skills, the value of these events lies in giving parents or caregivers the background on how to stimulate and encourage a child's development as well as entertaining the toddlers.

By the time children are 3 TO 5 YEARS OF AGE, they usually enjoy participating in group activities. Consequently, many libraries sponsor programs for this age group, and parents generally do not need to stay with their kids throughout these events. Popular activities include reading aloud, storytelling, films, puppet shows, arts and crafts, and reading programs.

Frequently, reading programs offer some kind of recognition - perhaps a certificate or book - to children who have read (or listened to) a specified number of books.

It is also worth noting that many libraries now offer special TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR CHILDCARE WORKERS and even invite large groups of children from daycare centers in for special programs, such as storytelling and read-alouds. If you have children

in daycare, be sure that the caregivers contact the local public library to plan such activities. Exposure to books and to reading should be an integral part of daycare activities, and the public library is probably the best resource available for developing and enriching such programs.

The kinds of MATERIALS AVAILABLE FOR CHECKOUT for children ranging from infants up to age 5 vary among libraries. There will always be books, though hardbacks, books with cardboard pages, picture books, and often cloth books, paperbacks, and magazines. The variety of subjects is tremendous, with everything from baby colors to bicycle basics, and from Bambi to keeping bugs in a jar. When your kids ask you endless questions about where they came from and why the sky is blue, chances are good there's a book at your library with answers they can understand. Or, if your children have homed in on favorite subjects - whether dinosaurs or donkeys - you'll find lots of fascinating books for them at the library.

Almost all libraries also offer recordings of children's stories and songs. Many also offer cassette tapes, compact discs, videotapes, book/cassette kits, and even puppets and educational toys. SEE WHAT YOUR LOCAL PUBLIC LIBRARY HAS TO OFFER. You and your kids may be pleasantly surprised. And the only thing it will cost you is some time.

For School-Aged Children

Libraries take on another important dimension for children beginning school. In addition to recreation, the library is a place to find information, usually for help with schoolwork. This expanded focus in no way diminishes the library's importance as a source of pleasure.

Most libraries offer a variety of programs for children to fill that bill. For elementary school children, there are variations of the read-alouds and storytelling hours that often include DISCUSSIONS AND PRESENTATIONS BY THE CHILDREN THEMSELVES, as well as summer reading programs. For middle and junior high school kids, there may also be book talks, summer reading programs, creative writing seminars, drama groups, and poetry readings.

But the books are central. The AGES 7 TO 9 are an especially critical time for children. These are the years when they normally make the transition from just hearing and looking at picture books to reading independently for enjoyment and for schoolwork. How well they make this transition will determine much about the quality of their lives.

It is very important to find well-written books for your children at this stage. A story that will make them laugh or want to know what happens next WILL MOTIVATE THEM TO READ even though it's difficult. Your local public library is filled with such books, and the children's librarian is skilled at locating these treasures. A growing number of very informative nonfiction books are available as well. Want to know how to dig up dinosaur bones or all about the different people in the world? There are good books that will fascinate even beginning readers.

Hopefully that sense of wonder and curiosity behind little children's endless questions will continue as your kids grow older. ENCOURAGE THEM TO LOOK UP ANSWERS to their questions in dictionaries, encyclopedias, atlases, and almanacs. These are resources you may want to add to your home library. Even if you do,

remember that your local library will have a larger selection and more materials on specific subjects, and the librarian will be glad to help your kids learn to use these resources.

And **DON'T OVERLOOK THE SCHOOL LIBRARY** as another valuable source for similar information and training. In fact, many schools and public libraries cosponsor children's programs. For example, a school may invite staff members from the local public library to give book talks or sign children up for library cards.

In elementary and junior high school, your children will tackle school assignments that require them to learn library skills. Teaching these skills is, in fact, part of the school curriculum. When you visit your children's school, stop by the school library, meet the librarian, and familiarize yourself with its many resources. In addition, if your kids' school sponsors books fairs, don't miss the opportunity to participate. You will probably be invited to help with the collecting, displaying, buying, and selling of children's books. This is an excellent way to learn more about children's literature.

Very often children in school will ask their parents for **HELP WITH LIBRARY ASSIGNMENTS**. And very often parents will find themselves gradually taking over and doing a report for their son or daughter. Obviously, such an exercise offers no long-term benefit to anyone. There are, however, things you can do to help your kids with library assignments:

- Ask your children questions about the assignment and encourage them to ask their teachers questions. This helps children to clarify what they're trying to do. Help them to identify

smaller components of the topic they're researching or to see the topic as part of a larger topic (brontosaurus is a subgroup of dinosaurs, which is a subgroup of extinct animals). These classifications will help them to identify useful references.

- Suggest that they look up the topic in the library catalog, periodical guides, and reference books. The librarian will direct them and help them get started. Be sure they know how to use a table of contents and index. Suggest they start with something general about the subject and be prepared to consult more than one source.
- Help them to break assignments into logical segments and avoid last-minute panics by setting deadlines for each phase of the work. Allow them plenty of time to gather the materials they need.
- Help them to determine if the community library has the resources they need or if they need to check other information sources.
- Encourage your kids to ask the librarian for help in locating materials and let them do their own talking.
- Give them encouragement, advice, and a ride if they need it, but resist the temptation to take over an assignment. Let your children assume responsibility for researching and writing reports. It's the only way they'll learn the library skills that they can use all their lives.

In many areas libraries have special services for helping kids with school assignments, such as **HOMEWORK HOTLINES AND TERM PAPER "CLINICS."** Check what's available at your local public library.

By far the most effective way to encourage your children to love books and reading is to read aloud to them, and the earlier you start, the better.

One of the most important and frequently available library services for school-aged children is the **SUMMER READING PROGRAM**. Recent research has shown that kids who participate in library summer reading programs begin the school year with stronger reading skills than those who don't. So, encourage your kids to participate in such programs, particularly if they have any difficulty with reading. Low-level reading skills and illiteracy are being recognized more and more as major obstacles to success for many young adults. Obviously, the more help youngsters get early on, the better.

The increasing number of **COMPUTER SOFTWARE PROGRAMS** available at public libraries are of particular interest to school children. Since kids generally are more interested and at ease with computers than their parents, computers are often found in the children's section as well as the adult department. Many public libraries offer training courses for children in using different software

or educational programs. Be sure your kids - especially your teenagers - know what's available at your local public library.

For Teenagers

Teenagers, of course, are more independent than younger kids, so parents will have a somewhat different role when it comes to helping them use the library and encouraging them to read for recreation. Just being certain that teenagers know what kinds of programs are available may be the best help you can give - that, along with setting the example of visiting the library and reading yourself.

There is no clearcut category of books for teenagers or young adults, although there are many novels written especially for teenagers, usually published in paperback. Some libraries have special sections for this age group; others include young adult materials with the adult collection. Teens generally make selections, especially for school assignments, from the adult collection. Thus, the range of choice is broad. In addition to books and magazines, many libraries offer compact discs as well as audio- and videocassettes free on loan.

A number of public libraries have developed special programs for teens to help them as they make the transition into adulthood. For instance, at some libraries there are teenage advisory boards to ensure that programs and materials for youth actually meet their needs. Some libraries publish book reviews written by their teenage patrons or help young people in the community to publish their own newsletters or magazines.

Many libraries enlist teenagers to help with programs for younger children, such as tutoring summer reading participants, doing puppet and crafts shows, storytelling, and

theater productions. In addition, libraries frequently offer part-time job opportunities for teens, both volunteer and paid, to help with such tasks as checking in books and reshelving materials.

Finally, the local public library can help young people seeking INFORMATION ON VERY SERIOUS, PERSONAL CHOICES. There is information on school and career planning, including choosing a college and financial aid. Many libraries distribute educational materials on drugs and alcohol for children and parents. Many others act as referral agencies to other community resources, including counseling centers and runaway services. And always there is an abundance of books.

Services for Special Children

If your children are GIFTED AND TALENTED, you may find that helping them to use the library offers special benefits and challenges. Gifted children usually have a love for reading and are able to learn on their own and advance to higher level materials at an earlier age. They tend to have a great deal of curiosity and desire for answers on a variety of subjects, so that they need access to a wide range of sophisticated sources of information. The public library can be a "learning laboratory" for these children, and very often they can make good use of its resources with relatively little assistance. However, if you want specific guidance for your gifted children, do not hesitate to ask the librarian for suggestions. Also, be sure to check with their school librarian who should be involved with the teachers in curriculum development and able to recommend supplemental library materials.

If your children are handicapped in any way, don't let this discour-

age you from introducing them to the world of books in your community library. The Americans With Disabilities Act, which took effect in early 1992, requires facilities and services regularly used by the public to be accessible to the more than 43 million Americans who are deaf, blind, use wheelchairs, or are otherwise PHYSICALLY OR MENTALLY DISABLED. Even before this act, most public libraries eliminated barriers to physically disabled individuals and many offered programs specially designed to serve people, including little ones, who are developmentally disabled, hearing-impaired, blind, or physically disabled.

The kinds of library services vary greatly for children who have LEARNING DISABILITIES or who are MENTALLY RETARDED. To find out what's available in your area, the best starting point is your local public library. If its programs do not address the special needs of your children, perhaps the librarian can refer you to other area libraries that do. Or, perhaps you can work with library staff to help meet your children's needs. Ask if they have seen the materials for library professionals working with youngsters who have learning difficulties, recently published by the Association for Library Services to Children (see "For More Information").

As more mentally retarded individuals are living outside of institutions and in the community, more libraries are working to integrate them into their programs.

In some places there are successful programs, such as book talks and storytelling, carefully designed to suit the interests and developmental levels of mentally retarded children, as well as bibliographies of books to use with these

children. If such services do not exist in your community, check with the local chapter of the Association for Retarded Citizens, a group home director, special education teacher, or your state library. While developmentally disabled youngsters may need special help, they have much to gain through reading and using library resources. So, it's well worth your extra effort to let library personnel know about your children's special needs and abilities.

HEARING-IMPAIRED CHILDREN, of course, have different communication needs. Helping your hearing-impaired child to read and use the library can be very beneficial, as well as challenging. Check with your local library or state library to find out what special services for hearing-impaired children are available in your area. Many libraries have staff members who use sign language or who are trained to work with hearing-impaired people. Some have information and referral services that may be called via Telecommunications Devices for the Deaf (TDDs). Some even provide TDDs and Television Telecaption Decoders.

There are a variety of **FREE** library services available for children, as well as adults, who are **BLIND OR PHYSICALLY DISABLED**. The National Library Service (NLS) of the Library of Congress provides the majority of such services. Working through a nationwide network of cooperating regional libraries, NLS offers Braille and talking book services free of charge to any person who is unable to read because of limited vision, who is physically unable to hold a book or turn a page, or who has been certified by a physician as having a reading disability due to an organic dysfunction. You can apply to the regional li-

brary on behalf of your child. If you have any difficulty locating a participating library near you, ask for help at your local public library or write to the NLS (see "For More Information").

Although NLS has a larger collection for adults, its offerings for children are extensive. There are hundreds of children's books in Braille, print/Braille, cassette and disc formats. Included are picture books and popular fiction and non-fiction at varying levels of interest and difficulty for children from preschool through junior high. There are also children's magazines and even music instruction materials available. The philosophy behind NLS' efforts is that blind and physically handicapped children are entitled to the same range of reading materials as their non-handicapped classmates and friends.

The same philosophy extends to their adult services, which are available to teenagers who read at the high school level and beyond. NLS is charged by Congress to provide only popular types of literature, so if you want textbooks or reference materials, check with NLS for other sources of assistance.

In addition, NLS offers a smaller collection of recorded and Braille books for children and adults in Spanish, bilingual formats, and other foreign languages (see "For More Information").

Postscript About Adult Services

Helping your kids to enjoy reading and develop intellectually is good incentive for taking them on regular visits to the local public library. But there can be plenty in it for you too. While your children are browsing, attending a special program, or working on a research paper, **TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY TO BROWSE**, too. There are

lots of books and magazines to delight and inform you. If your local public library doesn't have the book you're looking for, chances are good it can be obtained on loan from another library. And don't miss the compact discs, audio- and videocassettes usually free on loan.

Whatever kind of information you may need, don't overlook the public library as a likely source. Whether you're planning a major purchase, writing a resume, or wondering if your new car is a lemon, your library has many resources to help. There are consumer magazines and buyers' guides that compare products and services, tell you how to shop wisely, and how to complain effectively, if you need to. There is also information on job opportunities in your area and nationwide, as well as how to prepare and market yourself. In recent years, libraries have become distribution points for tax forms, and many offer seminars and other free assistance in preparing tax returns.

Most libraries today have **INFORMATION AND REFERRAL SERVICES**, so even if they can't give you the help you need, they'll point you in the right direction. Do you need to know where to register to vote? How to sue in small claims court? What housing and special services for seniors are available in your community? How to say "happy birthday" in Gaelic? The list of questions and concerns with which libraries can help is endless. In addition, libraries often have community bulletin boards that tell about local club activities, concerts, car pool locators, classes, and other events. If you have any difficulty finding what you need, remember that the librarian is there to serve you, so ask for help.

In addition, many public libraries today sponsor classes where you

can get literacy training that may include English as a second language. At your public library, you may also find classes where you can prepare for a high school equivalency exam, or earn college credits. There are lots of less formal classes, too, on everything from gardening and photography to computer literacy and most challenging of all - raising children.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Notable Children's Books. Updated annually, this list is available in bulk only (100 copies for \$24) from the American Library Association Graphics, 50 East Huron Street, Chicago, IL 60611. (This may also be available at your local public library.)

Books for Children. Selected by the Library of Congress as best books published recently for preschool through junior high school-aged children. Send \$1 to: Consumer Information Center, Department 149Y, Pueblo, CO 81009.

The Horn Book. Published six times a year, it has reviews, articles, and special columns about the best new books for children and young adults. For information, write: The Horn Book, Inc., 14 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108-9765.

Becoming a Nation of Readers: What Parents Can Do. Recent research findings and practical advice on how to help your children become good readers. Send 50 cents to: Consumer Information Center, Department 408Y, Pueblo, CO 81009.

The International Reading Association (IRA) publishes a number of brochures for parents. Single copies are available free and bulk copies at a nominal cost. For titles and ordering information, write to: IRA, 800 Barksdale Road, PO Box 8139, Newark, DE 19714-8139.

RIF Guide to Encouraging Young Readers. This book provides hundreds of kid-tested activities designed to engage children from infancy to age 11 in the fun of reading. It also includes an annotated reading list of more than 200 books and a resource section listing children's book clubs and magazines, books for parents, and organizations con-

cerned with children's reading and learning. The book is based on the best advice from Reading Is Fundamental, a national nonprofit organization associated with the Smithsonian Institution which has worked for more than 20 years to stimulate reading. For a copy (paperback, 324 pp.), send \$9.95 to Reading Is Fundamental, Inc., Publications Department, Smithsonian Institution, 600 Maryland Avenue SW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20024. (Also ask for RIF's list of other publications, including parent guide brochures available for 50 cents each.)

For a free information package for children or adults, write to: The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Library of Congress, Washington, DC 20542.

Also check at your local public library for:

- Book lists published by the local or state library.
- *Choosing Books for Children* by Betsy Hearne. (Delacorte Press)
- *A Parent's Guide to Children's Reading* by Nancy Larrick. (Pocket Books)
- *The New Read-Aloud Handbook* by Jim Trelease. (Penguin Handbooks)
- *For Reading Out Loud* by Margaret Kimmel and Elizabeth Segel. (Dell/Delacorte Books)

Helping Your Child Learn Geography

Parents are a child's first teachers and can do much to advance a youngster's geographic knowledge

Carol Sue Fromboluti

Children are playing in the sand. They make roads for cars. One builds a castle where a doll can live. Another scoops out a hole, uses the dirt to make a hill, and pours some water in the hole to make a lake. Sticks become bridges and trees. The children name the streets, and may even use a watering can to make rain.

Although they don't know it, these children are learning the principles of geography. They are locating things, seeing how people interact with the Earth, manipulating the environment, learning how weather changes the character of a place, and looking at how places relate to each other through the movement of things from one place to another.

With this book, we hope you, as parents, will get ideas for activities that will use your children's play to informally help them learn more geography - the study of the

Earth.

Most of the suggestions in this book are geared to children under 10 years of age. The activities and games are organized around five specific themes that help focus our thinking. These themes were developed by the Joint Committee on Geographic Education of the National Council for Geographic Education and the American Association of Geographers and are now being used in many schools. They are:

1. Where are things located?
2. What makes a place special?
3. What are the relationships among people and places?
4. What are the patterns of movement of people, products, and information?
5. How can the Earth be divided into regions for study?

These themes have been adopted

by many schools in the last few years and may be new to many parents. To help focus your awareness of the issues, we will begin each chapter with a brief description of the theme. This description includes examples of questions geographers use as they strive to understand and define the Earth, for geography provides us with a system for asking questions about the Earth.

LOCATION: POSITION ON THE EARTH'S SURFACE

Look at a map. Where are places located? To determine location, geographers use a set of imaginary lines that crisscross the surface of the globe. Lines designating "latitude" tell us how far north or south of the equator a place is. Lines designating longitude measure distance east and west of the prime meridian - an imaginary

line running between the North Pole and the South Pole through Greenwich, England. You can use latitude and longitude as you would a simple grid system on a state highway map. The point where the lines intersect is the "location" or global address. For example, St. Louis, Missouri, is roughly at 39 degrees north latitude and 90 degrees west longitude.

Why are things located in particular places and how do those places influence our lives? Location further describes how one place relates to another. St. Louis is on the Mississippi River midway between Minneapolis-St. Paul and New Orleans where the Mississippi and the Missouri rivers meet. It developed as a trading center between east and west, north and south.

Directions

To help young children learn location, make sure they know the color and style of the building in which they live, the name of their town, and their street address. Then, when you talk about other places, they have something of their own with which to compare.

- Children need to understand positional words. Teach children words like "above" and "below" in a natural way when you talk with them or give them directions. When picking up toys to put away, say, "Please put your toy into the basket on the right" or, "Put the green washcloth into the drawer." Right and left are as much directional terms as north, south, east, and west. Other words that describe such features as color, size, and shape are also important.
- Show your children north, south, east, and west by using your home as a reference point.

Sample Activity

Weather Vane

Materials: wire hanger, small plastic container, aluminum foil, sand or dirt, tape or glue, scissors, and crayon.

Directions:

1. Straighten out the hanger's hook and cover half of the triangle part of the hanger with foil. Fold the edges and tape or glue in place.
2. Fill the container with sand or loose dirt, put on the lid, and mark it N, S, E, and W. Poke the hanger through the center of the lid. The hanger should touch the bottom of the container and turn freely in the hole.
3. Put the container outside with the N facing north. When the wind blow, take a look at your weather vane. The open half of the vane shows the direction from which the wind is coming.

(Reprinted from Sesame Street Magazine Parent's Guide, June 1986. Copyright Children's Television Workshop.)

Perhaps you can see the sun rising in the morning through a bedroom window that faces east and setting at night through the westerly kitchen window.

- Reinforce their knowledge by playing games. Once children have their directional bearings, you can hide an object, for example, then give them directions to its location: "two steps to the north, three steps west ..."
- Use pictures from books and magazines to help your children associate words with visual images. A picture of a desert can stimulate conversation about the features of a desert - arid and barren. Work with your children to develop more complex descriptions of different natural and cultural features.

Maps

Put your child's natural curiosity to work. Even small children

can learn to read simple maps of their school, neighborhood, and community. Here are some simple map activities you can do with your children.

- Go on a walk and collect natural materials such as acorns and leaves to use for an art project. Map the location where you found those items.
- Create a treasure map for children to find hidden treats in the back yard or inside your home. Treasure maps work especially well for birthday parties.
- Look for your city or town on a map. If you live in a large city or town, you may even be able to find your street. Point out where your relatives or your children's best friends live.
- Find the nearest park, lake, mountain, or other cultural or physical feature on a map. Then, talk about how these features af-

fect your child's life. Living near the ocean may make your climate moderate, prairies may provide an open path for high winds, and mountains may block some weather fronts.

By looking at a map, your children may learn why they go to a particular school. Perhaps the next nearest school is on the other side of a park, a busy street, or a large hill. Maps teach us about our surroundings by portraying them in relation to other places.

- Before taking a trip, show your children a map of where you are going and how you plan to get there. Look for other ways you could go, and talk about why you decided to use a particular route. Maybe they can suggest other routes.
- Encourage your children to make their own maps using legends with symbols. Older children can draw a layout of their street, or they can illustrate places or journeys they have read about. Some books, like *Winnie the Pooh* and *The Wizard of Oz*, contain fanciful maps. These can be models for children to create and plot their own stories.
- Keep a globe and a map of the United States near the television and use them to locate places talked about on television programs, or to follow the travels of your favorite sports team.

Additional Activities

Children use all of their senses to learn about the world. Objects that they can touch, see, smell, taste, and hear help them understand the link between a model and the real thing.

- Put together puzzles of the

United States or the world. Through the placement of the puzzle pieces, children gain a tactile and visual sense of where one place is located in relation to others.

- Make a three dimensional map of your home or neighborhood using milk cartons for buildings. Draw a map of the block on a piece of cardboard, then cut up the cartons (or any other three-dimensional item) and use them to represent buildings. Use bottle tops or smaller boxes to add interest to the map, but try to keep the scale relationships correct.
- Use popular board games like "Game of the States" or "Trip Around the World" to teach your children about location, commerce, transportation, and the relationships among different countries and areas of the world. Some of these games are available at public libraries.
- Make papier-mache' using strips of old newspaper and a paste made from flour and water. If children form balls by wrapping the strips of papier-mache around a balloon, they will develop a realistic understanding of the difficulties in making accurate globes. They can also use papier-mache to make models of hills and valleys.

PLACE: PHYSICAL AND HUMAN CHARACTERISTICS

Every place has a personality. What makes a place special? What are the physical and cultural characteristics of your hometown? Is the soil sandy or rocky? Is the temperature warm or is it cold? If it has many characteristics, which are the most distinct?

How do these characteristics affect the people living there? People change the character of a

Geography is a way of thinking, of asking questions, of observing and appreciating the world around us. You can help your children learn by providing interesting activities for them, and by prompting them to ask questions about their surroundings.

place. They speak a particular language, have styles of government and architecture, and form patterns of business. How have people shaped the landscapes?

Investigate Your Neighborhood

- Walk around your neighborhood and look at what makes it unique. Point out differences from and similarities to other places. Can your children distinguish various types of homes and shops? Look at the buildings and talk about their uses. Are there features built to conform with the weather or topography? Do the shapes of some buildings indicate how they were used in the past or how they're used now? These observations help children understand the character of a place.
- Show your children the historical, recreational, or natural points of interest in your town. What animals and plants live in your neighborhood? If you live near a harbor, pay it a visit, and tour a docked boat. You can even look up the shipping schedule in your local newspaper. If you live near a national park, a lake, a river, or a stream, take your children there and spend time talking about its uses.
- Use songs to teach geography. "Home on the Range," "Red River Valley," and "This Land Is Your Land" conjure up images of place. Children enjoy folk songs of different countries like "Sur La Pont D'Avignon," "Guantanamara," and "London Bridge." When your children sing these songs, talk with them about the places they celebrate, locate them on the map, and discuss how the places are described.

Study the Weather

Weather has important geographic implications that affect the character of a place. The amount of sun or rain, heat or cold, the direction and strength of the wind, all determine such things as how people dress, how well crops grow, and the extent to which people will want to live in a particular spot.

- Watch the weather forecast on television or read the weather map in the newspaper. Save the maps for a month or more. You can see changes over time, and compare conditions over several weeks and seasons. Reading the weather map helps children observe changes in the local climate.
- Use a weather map to look up the temperatures of cities around the world and discover how hot each gets in the summer and how cold each gets in the winter. Ask your children if they can think of reasons why different locations have different temperatures. Compare these figures with your town. Some children enjoy finding the place that is the hottest or the coldest.
- Make simple weather related devices such as barometers, pinwheels, weather vanes, and wind chimes. Watch cloud formations and make weather forecasts. Talk about how these describe the weather in your town.

Learn About Other Cultures

People shape the personality of their areas. The beliefs, languages, and customs distinguish one place from another.

- Make different ethnic foods, take your children to an ethnic restaurant, or treat them to ethnic snacks at a folk festival. Such

an experience is an opportunity to talk about why people eat different foods. What ingredients in ethnic dishes are unique to a particular area? For example, why do the Japanese eat so much seafood? (If your children look for Japan on a map they will realize it is a country of many islands.)

- Read stories from or about other countries, and books that describe journeys. Many children's books provide colorful images of different places and a sense of what it would be like to live in them. Drawings or photographs of distant places or situations can arouse interest in other lands. The Little House in the Big Woods, Holiday Tales of Sholem Aleichem, and The Polar Express are examples of books with descriptions of place that have transported the imaginations of many young readers. There is a bibliography at the end of this booklet, and your librarian will have more suggestions.

RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN PLACES: HUMANS AND ENVIRONMENTS

How do people adjust to their environment? What are the relationships among people and places? How do they change it to better suit their needs? Geographers examine where people live, why they settled there, and how they use natural resources. For example, Hudson Bay, the site of the first European settlement in Canada, is an area rich in wildlife and has sustained a trading and fur trapping industry for hundreds of years. Yet the climate there was described by early settlers as "nine months of ice followed by three months of mosquitoes." People can and do adapt to their natural surroundings.

Notice How You Control Your Surroundings

Everyone controls his or her surroundings. Look at the way you arrange furniture in your home. You place the tables and chairs in places that suit the shape of the room and the position of the windows and doors. You also arrange the room according to how people will use it.

- Try different furniture arrangements with your children. If moving real furniture is too strenuous, try working with doll house furniture or paper cutouts. By cutting out paper to represent different pieces of furniture, children can begin to learn the mapmaker's skill in representing the three-dimensional real world.
- Ask your children to consider what the yard might look like if you did not try to change it by mowing grass, raking leaves or planting shrubs or trees. You might add a window box if you don't have a yard. What would happen if you didn't water the plants?
- Walk your children around your neighborhood or a park area and have them clean up litter. How to dispose of waste is a problem with a geographic dimension.
- Take your children to see some examples of how people have shaped their environment: bonsai gardens, reservoirs, terracing, or houses built into hills. Be sure to talk with them about how and why these phenomena came to be.
- If you don't live on a farm, try to visit one. Many cities and States maintain farm parks for just this purpose. Call the division of parks in your area to find out where there is one near you. Farmers use soil, water, and sun

to grow crops. They use ponds or streams for water, and build fences to keep animals from running away.

Notice How You Adapt to Your Surroundings

People don't always change their environment. Sometimes they are shaped by it. Often people must build roads around mountains. They must build bridges over rivers. They construct storm walls to keep the ocean from sweeping over beaches. In some countries, people near coasts build their houses on stilts to protect them from storm tides or periodic floods.

- "Go"camping. It is easy to understand why we wear long pants and shoes when there are rocks and brambles on the ground, and to realize the importance to early settlers of being near water when you no longer have the convenience of a faucet.
- If you go to a park, try to attend the nature shows that many parks provide. You and your children may learn about the local plants and wildlife and how the natural features have changed over time.

MOVEMENT: PEOPLE INTERACTING ON THE EARTH

People are scattered unevenly over the Earth. How do they get from one place to another? What are the patterns of movement of people, products, and information? Regardless of where we live, we rely upon each other for goods, services, and information. In fact, most people interact with other places almost every day. We depend on other places for the food, clothes, and even items like the pencil and paper our children use

in school. We also share information with each other using telephones, newspapers, radio, and television to bridge the distances.

Travel in Different Ways

- Give your children opportunities to travel by car, bus, bicycle, or on foot. Where you can, take other forms of transportation such as airplanes, trains, subways, ferries, barges, and horses and carriages.
- Use a map to look at various routes you can take when you try different methods of transportation.
- Watch travel programs on television.

Follow the Movement of People and Things

- Play the license plate game. How many different States' plates can you identify, and what, if anything, does the license plate tell you about each State? You don't have to be in a car to play. You can look at the license plates of parked cars, or those traveling by when you are walking. Children can keep a record of the States whose plates they have seen. They can color in those States on a map and illustrate them with characteristics described on the license plates. Some States have county names on their plates. If you live in one of these States, keeping track of the counties could be another interesting variation.
- Go around your house and look at where everything comes from. Examine the labels of the clothes you wear and think of where your food comes from. Why do bananas come from Central America? Why does the

milk come from the local dairy? Perhaps your climate is too cold for bananas, and the milk is too perishable to travel far. How did the food get to your house?

- Tell your children where your ancestors came from. Find your family's countries of origin, and chart the birthplaces of relatives on a map. You can plot the routes they followed before they arrived at their present location. Why did they leave their previous home? Where do all your relatives live now?
- Have your children ask older relatives what their world was like when they were young. They can ask questions about transportation, heating and refrigeration, the foods they ate, the clothes they wore, and the schools they attended. Look at old pictures. How have things changed since Grandma was a child? Grandparents and great aunts and uncles are usually delighted to share their memories with the younger generation, and they can pass on a wealth of information.

Follow the Movement of Ideas and Information

Ideas come from beyond our immediate surroundings. How do they get to us? Consider communication by telephone and mail, television, radio, telegrams, telefax, and even graffiti, posters, bumper stickers, and promotional buttons. They all convey information from one person or place to another.

- By watching television and listening to the radio, your children will receive ideas from the outside world. Where do the television shows they watch originate? What about radio shows?
- Ask your children how they

would communicate with other people. Would they use the phone or write a letter? Encourage them to write letters to relatives and friends. They may be able to get pen pals through school or a pen pal association.

REGIONS: HOW THEY FORM AND CHANGE

How can places be described or compared? How can the Earth be divided into regions for study? Geographers categorize regions in two basic ways - physical and cultural. Physical regions are defined by landform (continents and mountain ranges), climate, soil, and natural vegetation. Cultural regions are distinguished by political, economic, religious, linguistic, agricultural, and industrial characteristics.

Examine Physical Regions

- Help your children understand physical regions by examining areas in your home. Is there an upstairs and a downstairs? Is there an eating area and a sleeping area? Are there other "regions" in your home that can be described?
- Look at the physical regions in your community. Some neighborhoods grew up around hills, others developed on waterfronts or around parks. What physical regions exist in your hometown?

Examine Cultural Regions

- Take your children to visit the different political, residential, recreational, ethnic, and commercial regions of your city.
- Go to plays, movies, and puppet shows about people from different countries. These are often presented at libraries and

museums.

- Give children geography lessons by tying in with ethnic holiday themes. Provide children with regional or ethnic clothes to wear. Some museums and libraries provide clothes children can borrow. Holidays provide an opportunity to learn about the customs of people around the world. You can use the library to discover how other people celebrate special days.
- Compare coins and stamps from other lands. They often contain information about the country. You may be able to find stamps from other countries where you work, or your children may get them from pen pals. Stamps tell many different kinds of things about a country, from its political leadership to native bird life.
- Learn simple words in different languages. Teach your children to count to 10 in other languages. They can also learn simple words like "hello," "goodbye," and "thank you." Look at the different alphabets or script from various regions. All these activities expose children to the abundance of the Earth's cultural treasures. Many libraries have language tapes and books, some especially for children.
- If you have friends who are from different countries or have either travelled or lived abroad, invite them over to talk with your children. If they have pictures, so much the better. What languages do they speak? How are their customs or dress similar to or different from yours?

CONCLUSION

Geography is a way of thinking, of asking questions, of observing and appreciating the world around us. You can help your chil-

dren learn by providing interesting activities for them, and by prompting them to ask questions about their surroundings. Set a good example, and help your children build precise mental images, by always using correct terms. Say, "We are going north to New York to visit Grandma, or west to Dallas to see Uncle John," rather than "up to New York" or "down to Dallas." Use words such as highway, desert, river, climate, and glacier; and explain concepts like city, State, and continent. Many of the words used in geography are everyday words. But, like any other field of learning, geography has a language of its own.

Expose children to lots of maps and let them see you using them. Get a good atlas as well as a dictionary. Atlases help us ask, and answer, questions about places and their relationships with other areas. Many States have atlases that are generally available through an agency of the state government.

The activities suggested in this booklet are only a few examples of the many ways that children learn geography. These activities are designed to help parents find ways to include geographic thinking in their children's early experiences. We hope they will stimulate your thinking and that you will develop many more activities on your own.

(The original booklet provides a list of free or inexpensive materials such as maps, magazines and books. Ed.)

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Helping Your Child Learn History

Elaine Wrisley Reed

Imagine waking up one morning to find out that you have no memory! You are not able to remember who you are or what happened in your life, yesterday or the day before that. You are unable to tell your children from total strangers, you cannot communicate with people because you no longer know how to greet them, or understand their conversation. You don't remember what "the election," "war," or "the movies" mean.

Lack of HISTORICAL memory is parallel to this loss of individual memory. The link on which we depend every day between the past and present would be lost if we had no memory of our history. And we would miss a great source of enjoyment that comes from piecing together the story of our past.

Today American educators are working to promote the study of history in the schools and at home. Knowledge of our history enables us to understand our nation's traditions, its conflicts, and its central ideas and values. Knowledge of world history enables us to understand other cultures. We hope

to encourage children to love history and to enjoy learning about it.

HISTORY EDUCATION BEGINS AT HOME

Children and History

As parents we are in the best position to encourage our children's natural interest in history. It is to us they address their first historical questions: "WHERE DID I COME FROM?" and "WAS I ALWAYS HERE?" These two questions contain the two main meanings of "HISTORY": it is the STORY of people and events, and it is the record of times PAST.

Now is the time to bring out the historical evidence and to share family stories with your child. Birth and adoption certificates, immunization records, first pieces of your child's writing and art, as well as photographs all count as historical sources that tell the story of your child.

The stories you tell and read to your children, or make up with them, are part of their cultural heritage and reinforce the two basic

parts of history: "ONCE UPON A TIME, AND LONG AGO."

Parents Make a Difference

Your child is born into history. She has no memory of it, yet she finds herself in the middle of a story that began before she became one of its characters. She also wants to have a place in it.

As parents we can prepare our children to achieve the lifelong task of finding their place in history by helping them to learn what shaped the world into which they were born. Without information about their history, children don't "get" a lot of what they hear and see around them.

Your attitude about history can also make a difference for your child. Showing your interest in history - your belief that knowing history makes a difference for your life - encourages your child's own interest. Many parents say they love history. If you are one of them you can share your particular interests in history with your children as well as help them develop their own. Many other parents say

they find history boring. If you are among these, try one of the following: start writing your own life story; read the diary of Anne Frank, or the autobiography of Frederick Douglass; read the DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, or rent a video about the Civil War. As you rediscover history your children may be inspired your interest.

History is a Habit

The activities in this book can help you start doing history with your child. You will probably get more ideas of your own. In addition, you can develop some of the following "history habits" that make history important not only during an activity but every day.

History Habits for Parents

Habits are activities we do on a regular basis. We ACQUIRE habits by choosing to make them a part of our life. It is worth the time and effort to develop good habits because they enhance our well-being. We suggest the following history habits to enrich your life experience and your children's.

SHARE FAMILY HISTORY WITH YOUR CHILDREN, particularly your memories. Help your own parents and other relatives know your children and talk with them about family stories.

PARTICIPATE IN YOUR COMMUNITY by voting and helping to make changes in areas that interest you. Encourage your children to vote in school elections, to present themselves as candidates, and gain knowledge of history and the values and behaviors that are the basis of their citizenship.

READ NEWSPAPERS AND

NEWS MAGAZINES, and watch television news programs to maintain an informed judgment about the world. Talk about current events and your ideas about them with your children and other adults, and explore different points of view. Check the encyclopedia or your local library for additional historical information.

WATCH TELEVISION PROGRAMS ABOUT IMPORTANT HISTORICAL TOPICS with your family, and encourage conversation about the program as you watch. Get library books on the same topic and learn more about it. Check to see if the books and television programs agree on significant issues, and discuss their differences.

READ WITH YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT PEOPLE AND EVENTS that have made a difference in the world, and discuss the readings together. The list of publications at the end of this book serves as a support to you for choosing materials.

HELP CHILDREN KNOW THAT THE MAKERS OF HISTORY ARE REAL PEOPLE LIKE THEMSELVES, who have ideas, work hard, and experience failure and success. Introduce them to local community leaders in person if possible, and national and world leaders via the media and biographies.

MAKE GLOBES, MAPS, AND ENCYCLOPEDIAS AVAILABLE and use every opportunity to refer to them. A reference to Africa in a child's favorite story, or the red, white, and green stripes on a box of spaghetti can be opportunities to learn more about the world.

HAVE A COLLECTION OF

GREAT SPEECHES and written documents to read from time to time with your child.

Your own involvement in history, in any of the forms referred to in this book, is a good habit you can pass on to your children.

Enjoying Your Child and History

We have intentions of good fun as we plan any activity with our children. We also want them to learn something from most activities. They probably would say they want to have fun and learn something new too. But sometimes the difference in abilities between us and them, or the demands of time, end up leaving us disappointed. Keeping the following in mind can help keep your time together fun and productive:

YOU DON'T HAVE TO KNOW ALL THE FACTS or fully understand history to help your children learn. Your willingness to learn with them - to read, to ask questions, to search, and to make mistakes - is the most important gift you can bring to the process. By viewing their mistakes as sources of information for future efforts, your children gain confidence to continue learning.

CONVERSATION GETS YOU PAST THE DIFFICULT MOMENTS. Keeping open the communication between you and your children, and encouraging continued discussion no matter how off the mark your children may seem, tells them you take them seriously and value their efforts to learn. The ability to have a conversation with your children profoundly affects what and how they learn.

CHILDREN HAVE THEIR OWN

IDEAS AND INTERESTS. By letting them choose activities accordingly, you let them know their ideas and interests are valuable. Often they will want to teach you as a way to use what they know. Share their interests and encourage them to learn more.

MAKE THE MOST OF EVERYDAY OPPORTUNITIES to do history: visits from grandparents, reading books, telling stories, holidays, elections, symbols like the flag, the national anthem before sporting events, pictures in newspapers and magazines, visits to museums. If your child asks about a person in a painting, stop to find out who it is. Keep asking: "What does this mean? How do I know?"

CHOOSE YOUR ACTIVITIES WELL. The activities in this booklet are for children aged 4-11. Each of the activities can be adapted to a child of any age and ability level. Even a preschooler can "read" a newspaper with your help, for a short period of time. While an activity that is too difficult will frustrate your child, an activity that is too easy will lose his interest. Challenges bring feelings of accomplishment.

HAVE A GOAL. When you choose or begin an activity you may not have a clear idea of where it's going. But keep in mind that the purpose of doing the activities in this book is to learn something about history. The first section of this book, the introduction to each activity, and the question boxes can help you. As you complete each activity discuss with your child what you learned together. Making bread is one thing, knowing that bread has historical meaning is another. Achieving a goal for an activity also helps your child sense

the pleasure of a completed project.

THE BASICS OF HISTORY

The Meanings of History

If you look for the meaning of "history" in the dictionary you may be surprised to find that history is not simply the past itself. The first meaning of history is "tale, story," and the second meaning is "a chronological record of significant past events." The opening of tales for children - "Once upon a time" - captures both the story and time nature of history.

When we study history we are involved in a branch of knowledge that records and explains past events. Many would say that history is not just one branch of knowledge among others, but that it is the most essential one because it is the complete story of human endeavor. It happens that the word "history" comes from the Greek "to know."

The activities in this book are organized according to the two meanings of history as story and time in order to help you explore these meanings with your child.

THE STORY IN HISTORY

The **WORK** of doing history is to consider people and events that are no longer in our presence. Unlike doing science, we do history without being able to observe behavior and its results.

This work is **FUN** when we make the past meaningful. We do this by weaving together various pieces of information about the past. In doing this we create a pattern that gives shape to "just a bunch of facts." Doing history is a way of bringing the past to life, in the best tradition of the storyteller.

But not just any story will do. While there are many possible tales of the same event, good history is

based on evidence and several perspectives. The history with which we are most familiar is political history - the story of wars, peace treaties, and changes of government. But anything that has a past has a history. This includes the history of ideas, for example the concept of freedom, and cultural history, for example the history of music.

The story of history is interesting to us because it tells us about real people who had ideas and beliefs, worked and struggled to put them in action, and shaped the present in which we find ourselves.

TIME IN HISTORY

Human events take place in time, one after the other. It is important to learn the sequence of events in order to trace them, reconstruct them, and weave the stories that tell of their connections. Children need to learn the measures of time, such as year, decade, generation, and century. When they hear "Once upon a time in history" they need to be able to ask "When did that happen?" and to know how to find the answer.

Time in history is a kind of relationship. We can look at several events that all happened at the same time, and that together tell a story about that period. Or we can look at the development of an idea over time, and learn how and why it changed. And we can consider the relationship between the past and the present, or the future and the past (which is today!). The present is the result of choices that people made and the beliefs they held in the past, while the past, in being retold, is in some way remade in the present. The future will be the result of the coming together of several areas developing today.

The main focus of history is the relationship between continuity and

change, and it is important that our children understand the difference between them. For example, the population of the United States has changed dramatically over time with each wave of immigration. With the entry of these new groups into American society, bringing their own ideas, beliefs, and cultures, American democracy has continued and grown stronger. It continues to function according to its original purpose of safeguarding our basic values of freedom and equality, even as the meanings and effects of these values change.

A NEW LOOK AT HISTORY

History is now understood to be more than memorizing names and dates. While being able to recall the details of great people and events is important, the enjoyment of history is enhanced by engaging in activities and experiencing history as a "story well told."

ORIGINAL SOURCES AND LITERATURE ARE REAL EXPERIENCES. Reading the actual words that changed the course of history, and stories that focus on the details of time and place help children know that history is about **REAL** people in real places who made real choices that had some real consequences, and that they could have made different choices.

LESS CAN MEAN MORE. "A well-formed mind is better than a well-stuffed mind," says an old proverb. Trying to learn the entire history of the world is not only impossible, it feels too hard and reduces our enthusiasm for history. In-depth study of a few important events gives us a chance to understand the many sides of a story. We can always add new facts.

HISTORY IS HANDS-ON

WORK. Learning history is best done in the same way we learn to use a new language, or to play basketball: we **DO IT** as well as read about it. Doing history means asking questions about events and characters; searching our towns for signs of its history; talking with others about current events and issues; writing our own stories about the past.

THERE IS NO FINAL WORD ON HISTORY. There are good storytellers and less good storytellers. And there are many stories. But very rarely does any one storyteller "get it right," or one story say it all. A good student of history will always look for other points of view, knowing that our understanding of history changes over time.

YOUR CHILDREN DO WELL TO ASK "SO WHAT?" Much that we take for granted is not so obvious to our children. We should invite them to clear up doubts they have about the reasons for remembering certain things, getting the facts right, getting facts right, and collecting and judging evidence. At each step, asking "so what?" helps to explain what is important and worth knowing, and to take the next step with confidence.

ASKING QUESTIONS

At the end of each activity in this book, you will find a series of questions that can help develop the critical thinking skills children need to participate well in society, learn history, and learn from history. The questions help them know the difference between what is real, fantasy, and ideal, and make the activity more fun.

Critical thinking is judging the value of historical evidence; judging claims about what is true or good; deciding what information is

important to have; looking at a topic from different points of view; being curious enough to look further into an event or topic; being skeptical enough to look for more than one account of an event or life; and being aware that our vision and thinking are often limited by our biases and opinions.

The following two sections contain a sampling of history activities, organized by the meanings of history as story and time. Each group of activities is preceded by a review of three elements of story and time from the perspective of history. The review is meant to inform and support conversation between you and your child, which is the most important step in each activity by far.

ACTIVITIES: HISTORY AS STORY

RECORDS

History is a permanent **WRITTEN** record of the past. Because recording history is an essential part of doing history, a "history log" is indicated for each activity. More recently, history is also recorded on **AUDIO** and **VIDEO** tape, and many of the activities lend themselves to this type of recording as well. Your children may be interested to know that the time of their favorite dinosaurs is called "prehistory" because it is **UNRECORDED** history. They should also know that some written languages have been invented because telling stories orally, without recording them in some form, is not by itself a sure enough way to preserve the identity of a people.

NARRATION

George Washington, in his **FAREWELL ADDRESS** in 1796, said: "Though in reviewing the in-

cidents of my administration I am unconscious of intentional error, I am nevertheless too sensible of my defects not to think it probable that I may have committed many errors." This reflection is a good reminder that history, with its facts and evidence, is also an INTERPRETATION of the past. There is more than one cause for an event, more than one kind of outcome, and more than one way of looking at their relationship.

EVIDENCE

All good histories are written on the basis of evidence. Your children need to learn the importance of evidence, and to distinguish it from biases, propaganda, stereotypes, and opinion. They need to judge whether the many stories about John F. Kennedy or World War I, for example, are based on solid enough evidence to provide an accurate account of the life and times.

WHAT'S THE STORY?

HISTORY IS A STORY WELL TOLD. THROUGH STORYTELLING CHILDREN CAN UNDERSTAND WHAT'S INVOLVED IN WRITING THE STORIES THAT MAKE HISTORY.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Family members and friends; A fairy tale or folk tale; History log

WHAT TO DO

1. TELL A STORY OF A PERSON YOU KNOW. Gather your children, other family members, and friends to have a storytelling session. Choose a person you know about whom the group will tell the story. Decide who will begin, and go clockwise from there with each person adding to the story. Set a time limit so that

you must end the story somewhere.

2. READ A FOLK STORY OR FAIRY TALE, for example, LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD or THE STORY OF JOHNNY APPLESEED. Talk about how the story begins and ends, who the characters are and what they feel, and what happens. Ask how this story based on fantasy is different from the story you told about the real person you know.
3. READ A STORY ABOUT AN HISTORICAL EVENT. Now pick a moment in world history, for example the fall of the Berlin Wall, the French and Indian War, or a current event in the news headlines. Ask the librarian for help in choosing material that is at your child's reading level.
4. Help your child write in the history log about this storytelling experience.

PARENT BOX

In the storytelling session about the person you know, how did you verify the "truth" when there were differences of opinion about what "really happened"? If you were to write the story of a real event for the newspaper, what would count for you the most in preparing it? What else would you include? Where would you get your information? How would you check the accuracy of the information?

WHAT'S NEWS?

WHAT'S NEW TODAY REALLY BEGAN IN THE PAST. DISCUSSING THE NEWS IS A WAY TO HELP YOUR CHILD GAIN A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE EVENTS OF THE PRESENT.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Daily or Sunday newspaper; Weekly news magazine; A daily national news program; Highlighter; History log

WHAT TO DO

1. Decide on how often you will do this activity with your children - current events happen every day. This activity can be most useful to younger children if it is done from time to time to get them used to the idea of "news." Older children benefit from doing it more often, at least once a week if possible.
2. Look through the newspaper or news magazine with your child. Ask him to decide what pictures or headlines are related to history. Highlight these references. Some examples are the Yalta Treaty, the French Revolution, Lenin, Pearl Harbor, or Brown v. Board of Education.
3. Together read the articles you have chosen. Write down any references to events that did not happen today or yesterday, or to people who were not alive recently.
4. Have a conversation with your child about what these past events and people have to do with what's happening today. Help your child write in the history log the connections you find between past and present.
5. Watch the evening news or a morning news program together. Write down as many references as possible to past history and discuss the links you find between these references and the news story you heard.
6. During another viewing, help your child focus on how the information was communicated: did the newscaster use interviews, books, historical records, written historical accounts, literature, paintings, photographs?

7. Help your child compare several accounts of a major news story from different news shows, newspapers, and news magazines.

PARENT BOX

"THERE IS NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN," according to an old saying. Did you find anything "new" in the news? What "same old stories" did you find?

HISTORY LIVES

AT LIVING HISTORY MUSEUMS YOU CAN SEE REAL PEOPLE DOING THE WORK OF BLACKSMITHS, TIN WORKERS, SHOEMAKERS, FARMERS, AND OTHERS. CHILDREN CAN SEE HOW THINGS WORK, AND CAN ASK QUESTIONS OF THE CHARACTERS.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Visitor brochure and museum map; Sketch pad and pencils, or camera; History log

WHAT TO DO

1. Awaken your children's expectations of what they will see and what to look for. Write or call the museum ahead of time to obtain information brochures and a map. Living history museums are located in Williamsburg, VA and Old Sturbridge Village, MA, among other places.
2. Plan how to actually "visit history." Pretend to be a family living in the historical place. What would it be like to be a family living in the place you choose to go?
3. When you visit the museum, ask your child what his favorite object or activity is, and why.
4. Help your children sketch some-

thing in the museum, and put it in the history log. Tell your children that this is the way history was visually recorded before there were cameras.

5. Use your camera, if you have one, to make a "modern day" record of history, and create a scrapbook with the photographs of what you saw.
6. When you get home, talk about what it would have been like to live in that historical place in that period of time. Compare this to the image you had before your visit.

PARENT BOX

How were days spent in the period of time you experienced? What kind of dress was common, or special? What kinds of food did people usually eat, and did they eat alone or in groups? What kind of work would you have chosen to do as an adult? If a living history museum were made of the late 20th century, what would people see and learn there? REMINDER: if you can't visit a museum, travel by reading books.

ACTIVITIES: HISTORY AS TIME

CHRONOLOGY

While our children need the opportunity to study events in depth to get an understanding of them, they also need to know the SEQUENCE of historical events in time, and the names and places associated with them. Being able to place events in time, your child is better able to learn the RELATIONSHIPS among them. What came first? What was cause, and what was effect? Without a sense of chronological order, events seem like a big jumble, and we can't un-

derstand what happened in the past. It matters, for example, that our children know that the American and French Revolutions are related.

EMPATHY

Empathy is the ability to put ourselves in the place of another person and time. Since history is the reconstruction of the past, we must have an idea of what it was like "TO BE THERE" in order to reconstruct it with some accuracy. For example, in studying the westward expansion your children may ask why people didn't fly across the country to avoid the hazards of exposure on stagecoach trails. When you answer that the airplane hadn't yet been invented, they may ask why not. They need an understanding of how technology develops and its state at the time. Using original source documents, such as diaries, logs, and speeches, helps us guard against imposing the present on the past, and allows us to see events through the eyes of people who were there.

CONTEXT

Context is related to empathy. Context means "weave together" and refers to the set of circumstances in several areas that framed an event. To understand any historical period or event our children should know HOW TO WEAVE together politics (how a society was ruled), sociology (what groups formed the society), economics (how people worked and what they produced), and religion, literature, the arts, and philosophy (what was valued and believed at the time). When they try to understand World War II, for example, they will uncover a complex set of events. And they will find that these events draw their meaning from their context.

History means having a grand

PARENTS AND THE SCHOOLS

Parents and schools can be partners as they work toward their common goal of educating children. Following are some well-proven measures for supporting your children's study of history at school, and for forming productive relationships with those responsible for their education away from home:

1. BECOME FAMILIAR WITH YOUR SCHOOL'S HISTORY PROGRAM. ASK YOURSELF:

- What do I see in my child's classroom that shows history is valued there? For example, are maps, globes, atlases, and original source documents visible?
- Are newspapers and current events media part of the curriculum? Are biographies, myths, and legends used to study history?
- Does my child regularly have history homework, and history projects periodically, including debates and mock trials?
- Are there field trips relating to history?
- Is my child encouraged to ask questions and look for answers from reliable sources?
- How is knowledge of history assessed in addition to tests based on the textbook?
- Are my children learning history in elementary and middle school, and are the history curriculums well coordinated?
- Does the history curriculum include world history as well as local history?
- Does my school require teachers to have studied history? Or does it assign history classes to teachers with little or no background?

2. TALK OFTEN WITH YOUR CHILD'S TEACHERS.

- Attend parent-teacher conferences early in the school year.
- Listen to what teachers say during these conferences, and take notes.
- Let teachers know that you expect your child to gain a knowledge of history, and that you appreciate their efforts towards this goal.
- Ask the teachers what their expectations of the class and your child are.
- Agree on a system of communication with the teachers for the year, either by phone or in writing twice a semester, and whenever you are concerned.
- Keep an open mind in discussing your child's education with teachers; ask questions about anything you don't understand; and be frank with them about your concerns.

3. HELP TO IMPROVE HISTORY EDUCATION IN YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL.

- Volunteer in your children's history class, for example, to organize visits from the mayor or local historians, and to local historical sites.
- If you feel dissatisfied with the history program, talk to your children's teachers first, and then to the principal, history curriculum division, superintendent, and finally the school board. Also talk to other parents for their input.

old time with new stories. So, think about the relationship between history and time as you do the following activities.

TIME MARCHES ON

THE STORIES OF HISTORY HAVE BEGINNINGS, MIDDLES, AND ENDS THAT SHOW EVENTS, AND SUGGEST CAUSES AND EFFECTS. A PERSONAL TIMELINE HELPS YOUR CHILD PICTURE THESE ELEMENTS OF STORY.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Paper for timeline; Colored pencils; Crayons; Shelf paper or computer paper; Removable tape; History log (optional)

WHAT TO DO

1. Draw on a piece of paper, or in the history log, a vertical line for the timeline. Mark this line in even intervals for each year of your child's life.
2. Help your child label the years with significant events, starting with your child's birthday.
3. Review the timeline. Your child may want to erase and change an event for a particular year to include a more memorable or important one. (Historians also rethink their choices when they study history.)
4. For a timeline POSTER, use a long roll of shelf paper or computer paper. For a horizontal timeline, fasten it to the wall up high around the room using removable tape so that your child can take it down to add more events or drawings. For a vertical timeline, hang it next to the doorway in your child's room. Start with the birthday at the bottom. Your child can begin writing down events and add to it later.
5. For older children, have them do

a timeline of what was happening in the world at the same time as each event of their life. To begin, they can use the library's collection of newspapers to find and record the headlines for each of their birthdays.

PARENT BOX

What is the most significant event on the timeline? What effects did the event have on your child's life? What are the connections between the events in your child's life and world events at the time?

WEAVE A WEB

A HISTORY WEB IS A WAY OF CONNECTING PEOPLE AND EVENTS. IS THERE AN OLD BALL FIELD IN YOUR TOWN YOU'VE ALWAYS WONDERED ABOUT? OR DID YOU EVER WONDER WHY THERE ARE SO MANY WAR MEMORIALS IN YOUR TOWN? THEN YOU NEED TO DO A HISTORY WEB!

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Large piece of paper or poster board (at least 3 1/2 x 2 1/2 ft.); Colored pencils or markers; History log

WHAT TO DO

1. Pick a place in your community that has always seemed mysterious to you - an old ball field, general or hardware store, house, or schoolhouse. Or ask yourself: "What are there lots of in my town?" Churches, fountains? Pick one of these historical "families."
2. Go to one of these places. Jot down in your history log what you see and hear there. For example, look for marks on the buildings, such as dates and designs, or parts of the buildings,

such as bleachers or bell towers.

3. Find out other information about the place by asking a librarian for resources, or by searching the archives of your local newspaper. Look for major events that took place there, such as the setting of a world record or the visit of a famous person. Also look for other events that changed the place, such as modernization or dedications.
4. Find people who have lived in your town a long time. Interview them using questions about these major and related events, and any others they remember.
5. Draw a web, with the name of the place you studied in the middle (like the spider who weaves a "home").
6. Draw several strands from the middle to show the major events in the life of the place.
7. Connect the strands with cross lines to show other related events.
8. When the web is complete consider the relationships among the strands. (See PARENT BOX.)
9. Ask the editor of your local newspaper to publish your web. Ask readers to contribute more information to add to it. This is exactly how history is written!

PARENT BOX

When was the place you picked built? If you picked a "family" of places, when was each place built? If they were built around the same time, what similarities and differences do you notice about their features, such as style and what they commemorate? How is the place you picked connected to other events in history?

[For a complete list of activities and resources, consult the original book. Ed.]

Notes

The following sources were consulted in conceiving the introductory text: AWAKENING YOUR CHILD'S NATURAL GENIUS by Thomas Armstrong; BUILDING A HISTORY CURRICULUM by the Bradley Commission on History in Schools; HISTORY-SOCIAL SCIENCE FRAMEWORK FOR CALIFORNIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS by the California State Department of Education; FRAMEWORK FOR THE 1994 NAEP U.S. HISTORY ASSESSMENT by the National Assessment Governing Board; LEARNING HISTORY by A.K. Dickinson et al.; and THE ART OF EATING (No. 18), a newsletter by Edward Behr with an article on the history of breadmaking.

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Helping Your Child Learn Science

Being "scientific" involves being curious, observing, asking how things happen, and learning how to find the answers.

*U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement*

*Why is the sky blue?
Why do things fall to the
ground? How do seeds grow?
What makes sound and music?
Where do mountains come from?*

Young children ask their parents hundreds of questions like these. In search of answers, we use science to both enlighten and delight.

As parents, we must prepare our children for a world vastly different from the one in which we grew up. In the next century, this country will need citizens with more training in science and technology than most of us had in school.

Even children who don't want to be scientists, engineers, or computer technicians will need science to cope with their rapidly changing environment. But without our help, our children will not be prepared for these changes.

This article suggests ways you

can interest your children from about 3 to 10 years old in science. It includes:

- Some basic information about science;
- A sampling of activities for children to do - some alone, some with supervision - in both the home and the community; and
- An Appendix with practical tips on how to encourage schools to develop good science programs, a brief description of nine scientific concepts, and a list of recommended science books and magazines.

Many of the activities cost little or nothing and require no special equipment.

Science Starts at Home

We play a crucial role in determining how much science our children learn. Our enthusiasm and

encouragement can spark their interest. Fortunately, youngsters of all ages are curious and love to investigate. And the earlier we encourage this curiosity, the better.

Scientific knowledge is cumulative, so children need to start learning early - at home. Many of us assume that children will learn all the science they need at school. The fact is that most children, particularly in elementary school, are taught very little science.

How You Can Help

As parents, we don't have to have a strong background in science to help our children learn science. What's far more important than knowing what sound is or how a telescope works, is having a positive attitude about science.

Every day is filled with opportunities to learn science - without expensive chemistry sets or books.

Children can easily be introduced to the natural world and encouraged to observe what goes on around them.

Together, parents and children can -

- See how long it takes for a dandelion or a rose to burst into full bloom; or
- Watch the moon as it appears to change shape over the course of a month, and record the changes; or
- Watch a kitten grow into a cat.
- Bake a cake;
- Guess why one of your plants is drooping; or
- Figure out how the spin cycle of the washing machine gets the water out of the clothes.

Learning to observe objects carefully is an important step leading to scientific explanations. Experiencing the world together and exchanging information about what we see are important, too.

A nasty head cold can even be turned into a chance to learn science. We can point out that there is no known cure for a cold, but that we do know how diseases are passed from person to person. Or we can teach some ways to stay healthy - such as washing our hands, not sharing forks, spoons, or glasses, and covering our nose and mouth when we sneeze or cough.

Questioning and Listening

We should encourage our children to ask questions. A friend once asked Isidor I. Rabi, a Nobel prize winner in physics, "Why did you become a scientist, rather than a doctor or lawyer or businessman, like the other immigrant kids in your neighborhood?" Rabi responded:

My mother made me a scientist without ever intending it. Every other Jewish mother in Brooklyn would ask her child after school: "So? Did you learn anything today?" But not my mother. She always asked me a different question. "Izzy," she would say, "did you ask a good question today?" That difference - asking good questions - made me become a scientist!

If we can't answer all of our children's questions, that's all right - no one has all the answers, even scientists. And children don't need lengthy, detailed answers to all of their questions. We can propose answers, test them out, and check them with someone else. The library, or even the dictionary, can help answer questions.

We can also encourage our children to tell us their ideas and listen to their explanations. Being listened to will help them to gain confidence in their thinking and to develop their skills and interest in science. Listening helps us to determine just what children know and don't know. (It also helps the child figure out what he or she knows.)

Simple activities can help to demystify science - and we will suggest some of these later. But children also need to learn some basic information about science and about how to think scientifically. The following section contains information for parents that can point our children toward this goal.

THE BASICS

What Is Science?

Science is not just a collection of facts. Facts are a part of science. We all need to know some basic scientific information: water freezes

at 32 degrees Fahrenheit (or 0 degrees Celsius), and the earth moves around the sun. But science is much more. It includes:

- Observing what's happening;
- Predicting what might happen;
- Testing predictions under controlled conditions to see if they are correct; and
- Trying to make sense of our observations.

Science fiction writer Isaac Asimov describes science as "a way of thinking," a way to look at the world.

Science also involves trial and error - trying, failing, and trying again. Science does not provide all the answers. It requires us to be skeptical so that our scientific "conclusions" can be modified or changed altogether as we make new discoveries.

Children Have Their Own Ideas

Children develop their own ideas about the physical world, ideas that reflect their special perspectives. Below are some perceptions from some sixth grade students:

"Fossils are bones that animals are through wearing."

"Some people can tell what time it is by looking at the sun, but I have never been able to make out the numbers."

"Gravity is stronger on the earth than on the moon because here on earth we have a bigger mess."

"A blizzard is when it snows sideways."

Children's experiences help them form their ideas, and these often don't match current scientific interpretations. We need to allow our children to ask questions and make mistakes without feeling "stupid."

We can help our children look at things in new ways. For instance, in regard to the blizzard, we could ask: "Have you ever seen it snow sideways? What do you think causes it to move sideways sometimes?"

Hands-On Works Best

Children, especially younger ones, learn science best and understand scientific ideas better if they are able to investigate and experiment. Hands-on science can also help children think critically and gain confidence in their own ability to solve problems. Some science teachers have explained it this way:

What engages very young children? Things they can see, touch, manipulate, modify; situations that allow them to figure out what happens - in short, events and puzzles that they can investigate, which is the very stuff of science.

But, hands-on science can be messy and time consuming. So, before you get started, see what is involved in an activity - including how long it will take.

Less Is More

It's tempting to try to teach our children just a little about many different subjects. While youngsters can't possibly learn everything about science, they do need and will want to learn many facts. But the best way to help them learn to think scientifically is to introduce them to just a few topics in depth.

Finding the Right Activity for Your Child

Different children have different interests and need different science projects. A sand and rock collection that was a big hit with an 8-year-old daughter may not be a big hit with a 6-year-old son.

Fortunately, all types of children

can find plenty of projects that are fun. If your child loves to cook, let him or her observe how sugar melts into caramel syrup or how vinegar curdles milk.

Knowing our children is the best way to find suitable activities. Here are some tips:

- Encourage activities that are neither too hard nor too easy. If in doubt, err on the easy side since something too difficult may give the idea that science itself is too hard.
- Age suggestions on book jackets or toy containers are just that - suggestions. They may not reflect the interest or ability of your child. A child who is interested in a subject can often handle material for a higher age group, while a child who isn't interested in or hasn't been exposed to the subject may need to start with something for a younger age group.
- Consider a child's personality and social habits. Some projects are best done alone, others in a group; some require help, others require little or no supervision. Solitary activities may bore some, while group projects may frighten others.
- Select activities appropriate for the child's environment. A brightly lighted city isn't the best place for star-gazing, for example.
- Allow your children to help select the activities. If you don't know whether Sarah would rather collect shells or plant daffodils, ask her. When she picks something she wants to do, she'll learn more and have a better time doing it.

IMPORTANT THINGS TO LEARN

Basic Concepts

Elementary school children can be introduced gradually to nine basic scientific concepts - ones that all scientists learn. These concepts are listed at the end of this handbook. The concepts provide a framework into which scientific facts can be placed.

We will introduce three of these concepts (in this section) that you can easily introduce to your children at home or in the community. The activities described in the next two sections of this book are based on these concepts, as are many other simple science-related projects.

1. Organization

Scientists like to find patterns and classify natural occurrences. We can encourage our children to think about objects according to their size or color - for instance, rocks, hills, mountains, and planets. Or they can observe leaves or insects and group the ones that are similar.

2. Change

The natural world changes continually. Some objects change rapidly; some at a rate too slow to observe. We can encourage our children to look for changes in things:

- What happens to breakfast cereal when we pour milk on it?
- What happens over time when a plant isn't watered or exposed to proper sunlight?
- What changes can be reversed? Once water is turned into ice cubes, can it be turned back into water? Yes. But if an apple is cut into slices, can the slices be changed back into the whole

apple?

3. Diversity

Even very young children know that there are many kinds of objects. One thing to do is help your child explore and investigate a pond. Within and around a single pond (depending on the size and location of the pond), there may be tremendous diversity: insects, birds, fish, frogs, turtles, other water creatures, and maybe some mammals. Looking at a pond is a great way to learn about the habits, life cycles, and feeding patterns of different organisms.

Integrity

The early years of elementary school are a good time to start teaching children scientific ethics. We should tell them how important it is to be accurate about their observations. They need to know it's all right to make mistakes - we all make mistakes, and we can learn from them. But explain that important discoveries are made only if we are willing and able to correct our mistakes.

Help your children understand that we can't always take someone else's word for something. That's why it's important to find out for ourselves.

ACTIVITIES AT HOME

This section contains a sampling of science activities - organized roughly from easiest to most difficult - suitable for children from preschool through the early elementary grades. Near the end of each activity are a few facts and explanations for those who want them. But exploring, questioning, and having a good time is more important than memorizing facts. And, although your children may be able to do the following activi-

SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1. THE BIG PICTURE

Looking at objects closely is an important part of science, and a magnifying glass lets us see things we don't even know are there. It also helps us see how objects are similar or different from each other.

What you'll need

A magnifying glass; Your science journal

What to do

1. Use your magnifying glass to see:

What's hidden in soil or under leaves; What's on both sides of leaves; How mosquitos bite; Different patterns of snowflakes; and Butterfly wings.

How many different objects can you find in the soil?

2. Draw pictures, or describe what you see, in your notebook.

If you were able to examine a mosquito, you probably saw how it bites something - with its proboscis, a long hollow tube that sticks out of its head. Snowflakes are fascinating because no two are alike. Powdery scales give butterfly wings their color.

ACTIVITY 2: ATTACK OF THE STRAWS

Can a paper straw go through a raw potato? Here's an easy way to learn about inertia and momentum.

What you'll need

A raw potato; One or more paper straws; Your science journal

What to do

1. Put a potato on the table or kitchen counter and hold it firmly with one hand, making sure the palm of your hand is not underneath the potato. (If the potato is old, soak it in water for about half an hour before trying this activity.)
2. With a fast, strong push, stab the potato with the straw.
3. What happens? Did the straw bend? The straw should go into the potato. If it didn't, try again with another straw - maybe a little faster or harder.

An object remains at rest (the potato, in this case) or keeps moving (the straw, in this case) unless it is acted upon by some external force.

ties alone, we encourage you to join them.

Grown-Up Alert!

The activities in this book are safe with the appropriate supervision. Some require help from an adult. Others can be carried out by children alone, if they are old enough. Look in the instructions for the Grown-up alert! It will highlight an activity that may need supervision. Be sure your children who can read know which activities you do not want them to try by themselves.

Young children may not fully understand that bad things can happen to them. We don't want to scare our children away from science, but we must:

- Provide supervision when it is appropriate - for example, when using heat or mixing chemicals;
- Teach children not to taste anything unless they know it is good for them and is sanitary;
- Insist children wear goggles whenever fire or splatter could endanger eyes;
- Teach children to follow warnings on manufacturers' labels and instructions;
- Keep toxic or other dangerous substances out of the reach of young children;
- Teach children what they can do to minimize the risk of accidents; and
- Teach children what to do if an accident occurs.

Results

Keeping records is an important part of science. It helps us remember what didn't work as well as what did work. Someone asked Thomas Edison if he weren't discouraged after trying thousands of experiments - without results - to

make the incandescent light bulb work. He replied:

Results! Why, I have gotten a lot of results. I know several thousand things that won't work.

So before starting, get a notebook for recording observations. If your children cannot write yet, they can draw pictures of what they see, or you may want to take notes for them.

We should remember, too, that seeing isn't the only way to observe. Sometimes we use other senses; we hear, feel, smell, or taste some things (children should be careful, of course, about what they taste).

Let's Go

Science can be learned in many places and environments and just as easily from everyday experiences as from formal projects and experiments. We can get our children interested in science with simple toys, books, and objects around the house and have fun while we're doing it.

So, flip through the following pages and find something that looks like fun.

ACTIVITIES IN THE COMMUNITY

Our communities provide still more opportunities to learn science.

Zoos

Almost all children enjoy a trip to the zoo. We can use zoos to encourage our child's interest in the natural world and to introduce children to the many fascinating forms of life.

- Guessing games can help your child understand structure and function. "Why do you think the seal has flippers?" (The seal uses flippers to swim through

the water.) "Why do you think the gibbons have such long and muscular arms?" (Their arms help them swing through the trees.) "Why does the armadillo have a head that looks like it's covered with armor, as well as a body that's covered with small, bony plates?" (The armor and the small, bony plates protect it from being attacked by predators.) "Why is the snake the same brown color as the ground on which it spends most of its time?" (As snakes evolved, the brown ones didn't get eaten as quickly.) As your children mature, they will understand more complex answers to these questions.

- Children can learn about organization by seeing related animals. Have them compare the sizes, leg shapes, feet, ears, claws, feathers, or scales of various creatures. Ask them, "Does the lion look like a regular cat?" "How are they the same?" "Does the gorilla look like the baboon?"

Here are a few suggestions to help make your visit worthwhile:

Discuss expectations with your children ahead of time. What do they think they'll find at the zoo? Very young or insecure children may go to the zoo with a more positive attitude if they are assured that it has food stands, water fountains, and bathrooms.

Don't try to see everything in one visit. Zoos are such busy places that they can overwhelm youngsters, particularly preschoolers and those in primary grades.

Try to visit zoos at off times or hours (in winter, for example, or very early on a Saturday morning). This provides some peace and quiet and gives children unobstructed views of the animals.

Look for special exhibits and facilities for children, such as "family learning labs" or petting zoos. Here, children can touch and examine animals and engage in projects specially designed for them. For example, at the HERPlab (derived from the word herpetology) at the National Zoo in Washington, D.C., visitors can learn about reptiles and amphibians by doing everything from assembling a turtle skeleton to locating the different parts of a snake.

Plan follow-up activities and projects. A child who particularly liked the flamingos and ducks may enjoy building a bird house for the back yard. One who liked the mud turtle may enjoy using a margarine tub as a base to a papier-mâché turtle.

Museums

Museums are designed today to interest visitors of all ages. Science and technology museums, natural history museums, and children's museums can be found in many middle-sized and smaller communities like Bettendorf, Iowa, and Worland, Wyoming, as well as in large metropolitan areas like Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York.

Museums vary in quality. If possible, seek out those that provide opportunities for hands-on activities. Look for museums with:

- Levers to pull;
- Lights to switch on;
- Buttons to push;
- Animals to stroke; and
- Experiments to do.

Natural history museums sometimes have hands-on rooms where children can stroke everything from lizards to Madagascan hissing cockroaches.

Many museums offer special science classes. Look for

omnitheaters. These enable visitors to see movies on subjects ranging from space launches to rafting on the Amazon projected on a giant screen. The sounds and sights of the experience are extremely realistic.

If you are unfamiliar with museums in your area, consult a librarian, the Yellow Pages of your telephone book, a local guidebook, or the local newspapers, which often list special exhibits.

Many tips for visiting the zoo are also helpful when you visit museums or other community facilities. For example, don't try to cover too much on one visit, and do try visiting at off hours when the crowds won't seem overwhelming.

Planetariums

Planetariums have wonderful exhibits and activities for youngsters. There are about 1,000 planetariums in the United States, ranging from small ones that hold about 20 people to giant facilities with 300 or more seats. These facilities are particularly useful for children in urban areas, where metropolitan lights and pollution obstruct one's view of the solar system. Inside planetariums, children often can:

- Use telescopes to view the rings of Saturn;
- See the "sky" with vivid clarity from inside the planetarium's dome; and
- Step on scales to learn what they would weigh on the moon or on Mars.

To find the nearest planetarium, call the astronomy or physics department at a local college, your local science museum, or the science curriculum specialist or science teachers in your school dis-

trict.

Aquariums

Aquariums enable youngsters to see everything from starfish to electric eels. Children particularly enjoy feeding times. Call ahead to find out when the penguins, sharks, and other creatures get to eat. And check for special shows with sea lions and dolphins.

Farms

A visit to a farm makes a wonderful field trip for elementary school youngsters. But parents can also arrange visits. If you don't know a farmer, call the closest 4-H Club for a referral. Consider dairy farms, as well as vegetable, poultry, hog, and tree farms.

On a dairy farm, see the cows close up, view silos, and learn what cows eat. Find out from the farmer:

- Up to what age do calves drink only milk?
- When do they add other items to their diets? What are they?
- Why are the various foods a cow eats nutritious?

A visit to a farm also enables children to identify the difference between calves, heifers, and cows; to watch the cows being milked; to see farm equipment; to sit on tractors; and to ask questions about how tractors work.

If you visit a vegetable farm, encourage your children to look at the crops and ask questions about how they grow. If your children grew up in an urban area, they may have no idea what potatoes or beans look like growing in a field.

People Who Use Science in Their Work

See if your children can spend part of a day or even an hour with

CONCEPTS

The National Center for Improving Science Education recommends that elementary schools design curricula that introduce nine scientific concepts. Many of the activities described in this handbook teach these concepts, which are drawn from the center's recent report, *Getting Started in Science: A Blueprint for Elementary School Science Education*. The nine concepts are:

1. Organization

Scientists have made the study of science manageable by organizing and classifying natural phenomena. For example, natural objects can be assembled in hierarchies (atoms, molecules, mineral grains, rocks, strata, hills, mountains, and planets). Or objects can be arranged according to their complexity (single-celled amoeba, sponges, and so on to mammals).

Primary grade children can be introduced to this concept by sorting objects like leaves, shells, or rocks according to their characteristics. Intermediate grade children can classify vegetables or fruits according to properties they observe in them, and then compare their own classification schemes to those used by scientists.

2. Cause and effect

Nature behaves in predictable ways. Searching for explanations is the major activity of science; effects cannot occur without causes. Primary children can learn about cause and effect by observing the effect that light, water, and warmth have on seeds and plants. Intermediate grade children can discover that good lubrication and streamlining the body of a pinewood derby car can make it run faster.

3. Systems

A system is a whole that is composed of parts arranged in an orderly manner according to some scheme or plan. In science, systems involve matter, energy, and information that move through defined pathways. The amount of matter, energy, and information, and the rate at which they are transferred through the pathways, var-

ies over time. Children begin to understand systems by tracking changes among the individual parts.

Primary children can learn about systems by studying the notion of balance - for example, by observing the movements and interactions in an aquarium. Older children might gain an understanding of systems by studying the plumbing or heating systems in their homes.

4. Scale

Scale refers to quantity, both relative and absolute. Thermometers, rulers, and weighing devices help children see that objects and energy vary in quantity. It's hard for children to understand that certain phenomena can exist only within fixed limits of size. Yet primary grade children can begin to understand scale if they are asked, for instance, to imagine a mouse the size of an elephant. Would the mouse still have the same proportions if it were that large? What changes would have to occur in the elephant-sized mouse for it to function? Intermediate grade children can be asked to describe the magnification of a microscope.

5. Models

We can create or design objects that represent other things. This is a hard concept for very young children. But primary grade children can gain experience with it by drawing a picture of a cell as they observe it through a microscope. Intermediate grade children can use a model of the earth's crust to demonstrate the cause of earthquakes.

6. Change

The natural world continually changes, although some changes may be too slow to observe. Rates of change vary. Children can be asked to observe changes in the position and apparent shape of the moon. Parents and children can track the position of the moon at the same time each night and draw pictures of the moon's changing shape to learn that change takes place during the lunar cycle. Children can also observe and de-

scribe changes in the properties of water when it boils, melts, evaporates, freezes, or condenses.

7. Structure and function

A relationship exists between the way organisms and objects look (feel, smell, sound, and taste) and the things they do. Children can learn that skunks let off a bad odor to protect themselves. Children also can learn to infer what a mammal eats by studying its teeth, or what a bird eats by studying the structure of its beak.

8. Variation

To understand the concept of organic evolution and the statistical nature of the world, students first need to understand that all organisms and objects have distinctive properties. Some of these properties are so distinctive that no continuum connects them - for example, living and nonliving things, or sugar and salt. In most of the natural world, however, the properties of organisms and objects vary continuously.

Young children can learn about this concept by observing and arranging color tones. Older children can investigate the properties of a butterfly during its life cycle to discover qualities that stay the same as well as those that change.

9. Diversity

This is the most obvious characteristic of the natural world. Even preschoolers know that there are many types of objects and organisms. In elementary school, youngsters need to begin understanding that diversity in nature is essential for natural systems to survive. Children can explore and investigate a pond, for instance, to learn that different organisms feed on different things.

a park ranger, pharmacist, veterinarian, chemist, engineer, or laboratory technician. This can teach the importance of science for many jobs. Before the visit, encourage your children to read about the work so they will be able to ask good questions during the visit.

Nature Hikes

Many communities have parks, forests, or nature areas in which to walk. Some of these have centers where visitors can do everything from observe beehives to learn about flora and fauna. If these facilities are unavailable, walk around your neighborhood and help your children:

- Collect and identify leaves or rocks;
- Observe pigeons, squirrels, butterflies, ants, or spider webs;
- Observe differences among the dogs and cats you see; and
- Talk about the special features of the birds and flowers you encounter.

Science Groups and Organizations

There are special groups and organizations for children in many communities. Check out:

- Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, or Camp Fire, Inc.;
- Y.M.C.A.s or Y.W.C.A.s;
- 4-H groups; or
- The National Audubon Society.

Some groups focus solely on a particular science activity - ham radios, for instance, or computers. Schools sometimes organize groups for students with special science interests.

PARENTS AND THE SCHOOLS

Educators and policymakers are working to improve elementary school science, but parents also can help. Here's how:

1. Visit your child's elementary school and see what kind of science instruction is available. During your visit, look for clues as to whether science is valued.
 - Do you see displays related to science? Science learning centers?
 - Are science-related drawings on the bulletin boards? Are there plants, terrariums, aquariums, or collections (of rocks or insects, for example)?
 - Do you see any science equipment in evidence? Are there magnifiers? Magnets? Pictures? Films?
 - Does the school library contain science books? If so, ask the librarian if the children are encouraged to read them.
 - Is there enough space in the classrooms or elsewhere in the school for students to conduct experiments?
 - In science classes, do students work with materials, or is the teacher always demonstrating? Do students discuss their ideas, predictions, and explanations with each other as well as with the teacher?
2. Ask questions about the science program at parent-teacher conferences or PTA meetings. Or set up an appointment with the school principal. This provides you with information about the science program and lets educators know you think science is important. Educators are more apt to teach subjects they know parents are interested in. Here are some things to find out:
 - What facilities and resources are available to teach science? If the school budget for science is inadequate, has the school or district tried to obtain resources from the community, particularly the business community?
 - How often is science taught? Every day, once a week, or only once in a while?
 - Do the school and/or your children's teachers have clear goals and objectives for teaching science?
 - Can students do hands-on science projects?
 - Are activities available that parents can use at home to supplement class instruction?
3. Take action.
 - If the science program is inadequate, talk with your child's teacher or meet with the principal. If that brings no results, write to or meet with school board members. You might get better results if you organize with other parents who have similar concerns.
 - Volunteer your services to improve the science programs. You can:
 - Assist teachers and students with classroom science projects;
 - Chaperone science-related field trips;
 - Offer to set up a science display in the school's front hallway or in your child's classroom;
 - Lead hands-on lessons (if you have a good science background yourself);
 - Help in a computer laboratory or other area requiring adult supervision; and
 - Volunteer to raise funds for computers, a classroom guinea pig, or field trips.

Science Camps

Contact the National Audubon Society, which runs ecology camps, the National Wildlife Federation's Ranger Rick Wildlife Camp in North Carolina (which is a good choice for children who love nature); or the U.S. Space Camp at Huntsville, Alabama.

Other Community Resources

Look into botanical gardens, weather stations, hospital laboratories, sewage treatment plants, newspaper plants, radio and television stations, and after school programs such as Hands On Science Outreach, Inc., (HOSO) or a Challenger Center.

Learning from Toys

Children don't need fancy science toys or kits to learn science. But if you want to buy some for your children, plenty are available. Look in toy stores, hobby shops, other specialty shops, or in catalogs. It is beyond the scope of this booklet to recommend specific toys. However, these tips can guide you:

- Children may not benefit if a toy or activity is a poor match for their interests or temperaments.
- Learn what the toy can and cannot do before you buy it. Many youngsters have looked through a toy telescope and been disappointed when they couldn't see bumps and craters on the moon.
- Read instructions carefully so you gain everything possible from the toy.

In the Library and the Bookstore

Libraries and bookstores have a growing number of books to teach children science. Many are educational, beautifully illustrated, and

fun to read. But science can also be learned from "non-science" books, such as fiction, biographies, autobiographies, and history books.

When selecting books, remember that recommended reading levels printed on the jackets or backs of books are not always helpful. After the third grade, what children read is usually based as much on interest as it is on reading level.

The National Science Teachers Association asks a range of questions when evaluating books for young people:

Is the author reliable? Does the author have a good background and reputation? Is the content interesting to children? Is the sequence of events logical? Is the material accurate? Is the format pleasant? Are the illustrations accurate, and do they match the text? Is the vocabulary appropriate? (Big words are OK as long as they are explained and used in context.) Are biases evident (biases against race, sex, or nationality)? Does the book glorify violence? Are controversies handled fairly? Are the suggested activities safe? Practical?

If you need help in selecting books, consult a children's librarian or bookstore clerk.

(The appendices of the original book list some of the science books appropriate for elementary school children, and suggest places to find still more. The appendix also lists magazines and periodicals on science for elementary school children. Ed.)

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A Gentle Push for Reluctant Readers

Quah May Ling

Young people who can read (well or poorly) but won't far outnumber those who cannot read at all. The former, who choose not to read, for whatever reason, are often called reluctant readers. They have little advantage over those who are illiterate. The challenge of motivating our children to read in schools is two-sided. First, we have to rekindle a desire to read in those who have already decided to avoid reading at all costs. Second, there is the problem of igniting in children who are learning to read to have a lifelong interest in reading before they become reading casualties. This article will address the problem of reluctant readers, examine some major causes and indications of reading reluctance and discuss some approaches to reading instruction that will introduce children to reading in a positive manner so that potential problems may be alleviated.

Causes for Reluctance

A child's reluctance to read is often either a disguise for poor

reading skills or an indication that reading did not interest him enough for him to develop adequate skills. Sometimes half way through his school years or later, the child (or teenager) can read well but neither enjoys it nor appreciates its value. Whatever the reason, he may intentionally lose his place, make excuses about forgetting to bring the basal reader, ask to leave the classroom or complain of hurting eyes or headaches. All these behaviours are sending out messages of avoidance.

The causes of reading reluctance are many and varied. One of the most common causes is that related to the child's self-esteem when he "loses face" in front of peers. When a child is required to read aloud, he may make incorrect responses, as often reading is "a psycholinguistic guessing game" (Goodman, 1967), or does not know what is expected, what is correct or incorrect and these inadequacies are exposed to peers and teachers. If a decoding or reading error is corrected aloud by the teacher, the child's errors are im-

mediately pointed out to others in the group or classroom. In some instances, if the teacher is angry or irritated with the child's frequent reading mistakes and this is evident to the other children, the child will lose confidence in reading. Repeated experiences of this kind of failure result in frustration, loss of self-worth, and soon, anxiety over reading itself.

Other factors which contribute to reading reluctance include a lack of sufficient background information or schemata to enable the child to deal with the concepts, situations, or events found in the reading materials. Materials containing content which are foreign or outside the reader's experience are meaningless and do not catch the child's attention as they are not personally important.

Once a child begins to register a reluctance towards reading, a teacher may subconsciously label him a problem reader even though he may have developed some effective strategies to cope with reading. If a child is placed in a weaker reading group according to his

reading skills, it is likely that he will remain there virtually the whole school year and thus establish or reinforce a cycle of failure-frustration-avoidance-greater failure-greater frustration-more avoidance, resulting in the child becoming a self-fulfilling failure which will inevitably affect his self-esteem.

Approaches to Reading Instruction

Catching reading problems before they occur calls for a shift in both perceptions of the reading process and attitude towards reading errors, and a change in the reading materials used to teach reading. Reading teachers need to look upon errors as clues to the child's system of logic, rather than as a sign of lack of intelligence. A policy of encouragement during the early reading process will create an environment in which the child is relaxed and willing to take risks.

A successful remedial program must be structured in such a way that the risks the child is asked to take are those that can be managed. A gradual increase in the risk taking should be built into the reading task until the child is able to deal successfully with the risks inherent in a traditional reading session.

Michael (1981)

Results from experiments focusing on ways children could be trained to imitate others in imposing on themselves higher performance standards in game situations indicated that children who observed peer models exhibiting high or low standards of self-reward imitated those standards. The implications of these results where reading motivation is concerned suggest that reluctant or slow read-

ers would show marked achievement and interest, if they observed their peers modelling strong skills and interest. They also suggest that isolating poor readers in remedial classes away from better peer models, may be a self-defeating approach. A great deal of subtlety and tact are required of teachers in drawing children's attention to peer models, as well as a teaching policy of enthusiastic encouragement as opposed to comparison.

Reading in combination with other artistic and creative activities teaches children that reading is not an isolated task. For example, after reading a story, a child may draw or paint a picture of a scene in the story, or depict his impressions of the story. In addition to improving retention, this teaching method works as a springboard to motivate further reading on topics of interest and encourages personal responses to the reading materials.

Reading materials, probably the most critical factor in developing reading skills and interest should be appropriate for each child. Award-winning children's literature that children themselves might choose to read is likely to engage their interest in reading far more than the basal reading series, and it, too, can be used as a springboard to further reading in subject areas or by the same authors. Sometimes it takes only one good work to hook a child into a lifetime of reading or to rescue a child who is losing interest.

Using newspapers, comics, children's magazines and other materials that children come into contact in their daily lives (including language experience stories written by the children themselves) as part of instructional materials is an approach that will emphasise the fact that reading can be fun and that it has a purpose, something that

teaching skills in isolation often fails to do. Marvin (1993) found the use of newspapers for reading and writing a worthwhile pursuit if it was used in conjunction with cooperative learning groups.

Motivating Activities

Children's everyday activities are a fertile ground for developing literacy. Young children use oral language as a tool to solve problems and make sense of new experiences. Literacy begins as children learn to use the tool of language - from the spoken word to the pen and paper that help them write down their thoughts which can later be used for reading (language experience approach) to the books that enable them to learn from others (Britsch, 1993). The language experience approach to reading is recommended for use with reluctant readers because the approach utilizes the child's own interests to generate material for reading and writing and the teacher is able to work within the child's current level of language competence at all times, thus ensuring that no loss of face is involved.

Many activities have been developed by teachers for the classroom to keep young readers interested in reading while developing higher level skills. Some of these teaching ideas emphasise reading as a pleasurable activity. These ideas include games, multimedia activities and writing exercises that focus on survival reading materials, vocabulary extension, and skill reinforcement. Ciani (1981) provided suggestions for working with children who function at a frustration level or have an aversion to reading, including using popular music and motivating through improved self-concept.

Teachers in other subjects can use activities to integrate language

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arts with other subject areas including drama, science, photography and career awareness. An example of this activity is the use of restaurant menus in a science discussion class of the four basic food groups to see how restaurants group their foods. These activities can prove particularly useful in reminding children that reading is not a separate subject but is an important process used in all subject areas.

Factors outside the classroom, particularly the home environment, may also have an impact on reading motivation. Exposure to reading aloud, to being read to by adults and siblings and to using the library will generate early reading interest in children. Another valuable support for the reading programme is the class, school or home computer. With just one computer and one printer, the teacher and children can create a rich assortment of original projects to add to their enjoyment of reading (Ramondetta, 1993). The graphics which may include superheroes and aliens are bound to capture the children's imagination and the professional-looking results will motivate even your most reluctant readers.

Conclusion

The educational path is wide enough and has sufficient branches and sideroads to accommodate all children. A fresh approach to the reading process, a positive attitude towards reading errors (children can learn from them!) and a variety of activities that integrate isolated skills and present reading as a way to gather exciting and useful information can provide just the gentle nudges needed to keep many children from wandering off or getting left behind.

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Adapting Western Counselling Approaches to the Local Context

Cecilia Soong

Singapore is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society with an ethnic composition of Chinese, Malays, Indians and other ethnic groups, who embrace religions like Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, etc. In the light of this ethnic and cultural diversity, counsellors are still employing fundamentally Western counselling methods. How aware and sensitive are counsellors to the cultural norms, values and philosophical orientations of their counselees? When using the various counselling approaches - affective, cognitive, behavioural - do counsellors take into account the cultural values that counselees hold and philosophical orientations they take? How can counsellors become more culturally aware? In what ways do western counselling approaches have to be modified, and what are the ingredients that have to be present in the training of the counsellors to become more culturally aware? This paper ad-

dresses these issues in the context of teachers' counselling with students in Singapore schools.

Counsellor Training for Teachers

The National Institute of Education conducts courses in Pastoral Care and Career Guidance for both pre-service and in-service teachers. Pre-service teachers can choose to do an elective on Basic Skills in Pastoral Casework covering topics in: Understanding Child/Adolescent Maladjustment, Understanding the Counselling Relationship, Assessment in Pastoral Casework, Client-centred Approach in Counselling, Case Study Approach in Counselling, Reality Therapy, Rational-Emotive Therapy, Transactional Analysis, Use of Behaviour Modification in Counselling and Networking with the Family and the Community.

In addition to this course, in-service teachers can pursue another course in Advanced Skills in Pas-

toral Casework and Groupwork which is part of a eight module programme leading to a diploma in Pastoral Care and Career Guidance. The areas delineated in this advanced course include Developmental Groupwork and Group Counselling, Group Counselling Theories and Approaches (Client-centred, Behavioural, Cognitive-behavioural, Gestalt, Psychodrama), Family Counselling, Crisis Intervention, Counsellor Self-awareness and Evaluation, Core Conditions in Counselling and Advanced Communication Skills.

Perception of Teacher as Counsellor

Teachers are seen as figures of authority, and Asian children are taught from young to defer to authority and obey their elders. Those who come from Confucian, Muslim and Hindu backgrounds are trained to respect their parents and teachers very highly and may remain silent in their presence. For

this reason, Yeo (1993) proposes that the problem-solving model, which is directive, can be incorporated into Asian culture where the mental health professional is in authority.

Another concern of Asians is the notion of 'loss of face', where their sense of pride renders going for help a loss of dignity. A Straits Times survey in 1992 revealed that students rarely consulted teachers for their personal problems, only academic ones. The implication for the teacher-counsellor with regard to these two issues is that the development of rapport and trust with their students is of utmost importance.

Use of Counselling Approaches

Affective

The affective approaches taught in the counselling courses are Rogers' Client-centred Counselling and Perls' Gestalt Therapy. Affective approaches to counselling take a non-directive stance, and focus on feelings and the individual. Asians have been found to prefer concrete and tangible approaches to life (Sue & Kirk, 1975) and to exercise emotional restraint (Sue & Sue, 1990). In the experience of Singapore teacher-counsellors, students often go to them for advice; they are not so interested in expressing feelings or gaining insights. For instance, a student may be saying, 'Don't ask me how I feel about my failure, I want to know some tips on how to pass my exams!'

Or the teenage student who is pregnant may be saying, 'Tell me how I can go about getting an abortion, I don't want to talk about how I feel about going through an abortion.' Part of the explanation could be the 'instant mentality' that

Singaporeans have developed in a society that greatly stresses excellence and achievement.

Teachers find that there is a difference between secondary and primary school students with regard to the use of affective approaches. With the older students, who are more vocal and more expressive of their feelings (possibly a result of the Pastoral Care programme), teacher-counsellors have found affective approaches useful. In the case of primary school students who lack communication skills and thus the inability to express feelings, limited use of affective approaches has been reported. Moreover, some ethnic groups put less emphasis on verbal skills. Nevertheless, it can be surmised that living in this fast-paced society, Singaporeans do not accord much value to processes, rather the products. Thus affective approaches, having higher tendencies towards greater expenditure of time and emotions, may not be as practicable as a more concrete and directive approach where students could be helped to deal with their problems in a couple of sessions. An implication for teacher-counsellors is that they need to be more competent in employing brief and directive counselling techniques.

The focus on the individual in affective approaches is evident as emotional expression leads to self-exploration. In the context of Asian societies, one's self-worth and self-identity is strongly tied to the family (Sue & Sue, 1990). The Asian individual rarely makes his own decisions all by himself, but they are made in consultation with the family. It is because of this strong bonding that family members may be affected by the symptoms and problems of another member. An implication of this for the teacher-counsellor is the need to work with

the family which will be discussed in a later part of the paper.

Cognitive

One of the approaches used in training teacher-counsellors is Reality Therapy propounded by William Glasser. Being a direct and confrontational approach, it appears that this may not be useful as Asians tended to take on a less confrontational stance (Nakao & Lun, 1977). In the case of Singapore schools, teachers expressed the view that they found Reality Therapy useful, especially in working with students with discipline problems. They found that they were able to confront and challenge students about their inappropriate behaviours. The systematic framework of exploring wants, needs and perceptions; exploring total behaviour and evaluating; and planning and commitment augurs well with the Asians' preference for a structured and concrete approach.

Albert Ellis' Rational-Emotive Therapy which focuses on identifying, challenging and disputing irrational beliefs that lead to negative emotions and irrational behaviours, has not found a large following among teacher-counsellors. According to Lum (1982), the road to mental health is to 'avoid morbid thoughts', and 'to keep busy and don't think about one's problems' (Sue & Sue, 1990). Brought up with such injunctions from parents, it is little wonder that to ameliorate one's problems, it is important for the Singaporean student to do something about it rather than think about it.

Behavioural

The behavioural methods discussed in counselling courses include the use of reinforcement, systematic desensitization, positive

practice (lifeskills), self-monitoring (diaries, checklists), relaxation and stress management, assertiveness training and contracting. From the feedback of teachers, behavioural methods have proven helpful, particularly with primary school students. Reinforcement schedules and contracting are especially useful in motivating students towards positive behaviours. The scenario in the secondary schools is such that with the strong orientation towards academic excellence, teachers have reported that study skills, the use of contracts in time management, and stress management are helping behavioural methods. To reiterate, it thus comes as no surprise that Singaporean students welcome these behavioural strategies, the latter being specific and tangible.

One likely arena that poses difficulty is that of assertiveness training. With Asian values like emotional restraint, modesty, humility and deference to authority, being assertive would not only be contradictory to these values, but one may appear rude and disrespectful. Coupled with the Asians' use of indirect communication, it would be rather uncomfortable for the Asian to verbalise something akin to 'I feel disappointed and upset that you have missed me out of the game'. This difficulty is compounded when such an assertive statement is being used with one's parents or teachers.

Taking into consideration the Asian cultural context of Singapore's students, Yeo (1993) purports the use of Reality Therapy and behavioural approaches for students.

Groupwork

According to Vontress (1981), one of the psychosocial barriers to counselling is that of self-disclo-

sure. If this is a barrier in one-to-one counselling, its gravity would escalate in a group situation. There are difficulties in expressing one's feelings and the pressures would mount when this is done in the presence of six or more other members of the group.

When information about family circumstances in relation to the student's situation is to be offered, the student may hesitate to self-disclose to members of the group as, among Asians, great emphasis is placed on confidentiality and privacy about family matters. Revelation of intimate information about one's family may be taboo in Asian cultures and may also inject feelings of guilt and shame in the student.

The onus thus lies on the teacher to emphasise group rules from the outset. These rules could be: set goals for yourself, discuss as honestly and concretely about the nature of your problem, listen intently to others, maintain confidentiality, the provision to pass, request for individual counselling is permissible, etc.

Working with the Family

In the eyes of Asian parents, the counsellor is a wise old man from whom advice given is acceptable. Mau & Jepsen (1988) concurs that 'counselling is an authoritative process in which a good counsellor is more direct and active while portraying a father figure'. Teacher-counsellors who are younger may not be seen as wise. This difficulty is exacerbated by the belief of parents that family affairs are to be kept private and confidential.

The teacher-counsellor has thus to earn the respect of the parents, and it would be to his/her advantage to know some cultural aspects of working with Asian families. Showing respect to the elders and

The Asian individual rarely makes his own decisions all by himself, but they are made in consultation with the family.

It takes a lot of skills on the part of the teacher-counsellor to dispel myths about western counselling methods, to confront and educate, to explore the situation and provide insights, and to suggest plausible options for action.

practising interpersonal graces like asking parents to speak first would put the teacher-counsellor in a positive light. It also helps teacher-counsellors to be mindful of the fact that, the student in the presence of his/her parents, especially the father, would accept his authority beyond question and would be forbidden to express overt feelings.

Another issue to grapple with is the perception of some Asian parents that counselling is of no use. One father actually insists that his son stops the counselling sessions with a teacher-counsellor as he deems them a waste of time. It would be useful for the teacher-counsellor to explore with the parents their views of counselling or healing. Conflicts between counselling interventions and parental views of traditional healing may arise. In such instances, how can a teacher-counsellor suggest counselling interventions? Counselling under such conditions requires a counsellor who is non-judgmental, who is aware of the cultural/religious methods of healing, and shows acceptance of the parents, not necessarily their ways of doing things. It takes a lot of skills on the part of the teacher-counsellor to dispel myths about western counselling methods, to confront and educate, to explore the situation and provide insights, and to suggest plausible options for action. All these have to be done in the light of mutual concern for the welfare of the student and in an atmosphere of trust and respect for the parents.

Conclusion

In working with a diverse group of students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, the teacher-counsellor has first to be aware of his viewpoints with regard to another ethnic group's worldview, motivation, etc. He has

to be careful to adapt western counselling approaches to the cultural and religious contexts of his students. When working with Asian families, it behooves him to learn the proper protocol before he can be given a reception. Having a knowledge of traditional healing practices would put the teacher-counsellor in good stead. Whether working with ethnically and culturally different clients or not, it need not be overemphasised that the underlying thread that runs through is the crucial need to listen, whilst showing warmth, genuineness and empathy.

Training in counselling thus has to help participants be culturally aware and to adopt methods that are useful and practical, after having considered the philosophical orientations and cultural/religious values of the different ethnic groups.

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THE POWER OF VISION and THE BUSINESS OF PARADIGMS

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