

READING
rockets



Empowering

Parents

Reading Rockets Parents' Guide



Raising a Reader!

Reading is a critical skill for everyone. From the moment your child is born, there are simple things you can do to help him become a good reader. You can also watch for signs that he may have trouble learning to read, so that you can get help early.

This guide will help you . . .

- build your child's early reading skills at home
- recognize signs of trouble
- support your child as she enters school
- understand options for extra support
- recognize when you need to go outside the school for help



More on the Web

Our Web site **ReadingRockets.org** has in-depth information about all the topics we'll cover in this guide. On each page, check out the yellow box at the bottom for the address of a Web page that can take you closer to a solution for your child.

To learn more about reading, visit
www.ReadingRockets.org/learnaboutreading

Parents Are a Child's First Teacher.

Babies and toddlers learn a lot at home. Here are some simple things you can do around the house that will help your little ones develop into readers and writers.



- **Talk, talk, talk!** Your child will learn about spoken words just from listening to you.
- **Read to your child.** Share books you loved and try some new ones from the library. Reread favorites over and over again!
- **Point out interesting words as you read.** Help your child understand that the squiggles on the page have meaning.
- **Talk about books.** Retell exciting stories at the dinner table. Encourage your child to share his favorite parts.
- **Connect what kids already know to what they hear or read.** This helps your children understand more about the world around them.
- **Write for a purpose.** As you're writing your grocery list or a thank you note, share your work with your child. Don't be surprised if she asks to borrow the pencil!

Additional Tips

For more ideas about how you can help at home, visit www.ReadingRockets.org/families



Early Signs of

Trouble

In addition to talking, reading, and writing with your child, you also need to be on the lookout for early signs of possible trouble. Here are two of the biggest to watch out for:

- **Language or speech problems:** Children who talk late, who say very few words, who have trouble pronouncing words, or who have difficulty expressing feelings verbally may have trouble learning to read.
- **Hearing impairment:** Children who have difficulty hearing the individual sounds in words may have trouble understanding how those sounds connect with letters in written words.

Kids who might have trouble learning to read also may show some of these early warning signs:

- Difficulty rhyming words
- Difficulty learning the alphabet, numbers, or days of the week
- Difficulty following multi-step directions
- Difficulty telling or re-telling a story

You can avoid years of frustration for you and your child by recognizing such problems early and getting the right help. Start with your family doctor — and your local school district may be able to help, too.

What else should I watch for?

For a list of other warning signs, visit www.ReadingRockets.org/dontwait

The Power of

Preschool

A good preschool can help your child stay on track for learning how to read. As you visit, observe, and choose a preschool, look for classrooms that include the following sorts of activities each day.

- Reading books, poems, and nursery rhymes aloud
- Talking with children and encouraging them to talk
- Helping children learn letter names and sounds
- Playing games that help children learn to recognize rhymes and similar sounds
- Exploring writing with the children
- Exposing children to new and interesting words within their classroom

Free Online Screening Tool

To find out if your four year old is on track for learning how to read, try this simple online screening tool:

www.ReadingRockets.org/getready





Helping Hands!

During your child's preschool years, help him build the following strengths. They may make learning to read easier.

- **A good vocabulary.** Can your child express her needs and wants using words? Does your child understand you when you speak directly to her? Can she tell a story?
- **Following directions.** Can your child follow simple two or three step directions?
- **Learning letters and sounds.** Can your four year old name some of the letters of the alphabet? Does he enjoy reading favorite books and writing using letter-like forms?

Know the Milestones

For more information about literacy milestones by age five, visit www.ReadingRockets.org/agesandstages



Good Early Reading Instruction

Once your child starts kindergarten, it's critical for you to know what research-based reading instruction looks like — and to know if your child is getting it. Talk with the teacher and ask two important questions: 1. Do you provide explicit instruction to the students? and 2. Is your instruction based on a recent assessment? Then observe a reading lesson. A good lesson will focus on one or more of these elements.

- **Phonemic awareness:** Are the students playing games with the sounds in spoken words? For example, "*Sun, sock, and sand* all start with *s*. What is another word that begins with that sound?"
- **Phonics:** Do small groups of students work with letters and sounds? Do you see reading materials that contain the letters and sounds they're studying?
- **Fluency:** Once kids begin to read books, are they reading and rereading familiar books and poems? Does the teacher listen to the students read aloud?
- **Vocabulary:** Are the students talking with each other and the teacher? Does the teacher share interesting words?
- **Comprehension:** Does the teacher teach strategies to help kids understand what they read? Are students encouraged to ask and answer questions about what they've read?

Dig Deeper

For more information about the signs of a good early reading program, visit www.ReadingRockets.org/readingprogram



Important School

Features

Good schools and good teachers . . .

- Conduct **ongoing assessments** to determine whether students are making progress
- **Change students' reading group placements** during the year based on the ongoing assessment results
- Teach phonemic awareness and phonics in **small groups**
- Use a **variety of teaching methods** to keep children motivated and excited
- Use a **variety of interventions** to ensure that all children succeed

Find Out More

For more information about what good schools look like, visit www.ReadingRockets.org/schoolfeatures



Signs of Trouble in School

Once your child moves into first, second, and third grade, reading fluently and comprehending what she reads become critical for her future success in school. Here are some things to watch for that may suggest that your child is a struggling reader.

Does your child . . .

- Have difficulty remembering lessons?
- Hate to read aloud?
- Guess at words?
- Continue to need to sound out most words on a page?
- Struggle as he is working to sound out the words?
- Read slowly with a very choppy sound?
- Complain that she doesn't understand what she's read?

If so, talk with your school about getting your child some extra help. You also may want to consult with a private reading specialist.



What do successful learners look like?

For first graders, visit www.ReadingRockets.org/1stgrade
For second graders, visit www.ReadingRockets.org/2ndgrade
For third graders, visit www.ReadingRockets.org/3rdgrade



Getting Extra Help: Tutoring Programs

Sometimes kids just need an extra dose of reading help. Many schools provide tutoring support that includes one-on-one reading instruction. To make sure that your school has a high quality tutoring program, ask these questions:

- **How are the tutors trained?** It's important that the tutors understand the goals and purposes of the lesson.
- **What is the structure of the tutoring session?** Good tutoring programs use a lesson plan that is based in the best reading research.
- **How frequently will my child receive tutoring?** Students should be tutored at least twice a week, for 45 to 60 minutes each time. Some students will need more.
- **Are the students assessed regularly to determine progress?** A reading specialist should supervise the assessment program.
- **What types of materials are used during the tutoring sessions?** Students should be carefully guided through books that are written at their reading level.
- **Does the content of the tutoring session support my child's classroom instruction?** It should.
- **Does the content address my child's specific needs?** If your child sounds out words well but struggles with vocabulary, the tutor should spend more time on word meanings than phonics.

Tutoring Works!

For evidence that tutoring works, please visit
www.ReadingRockets.org/tutoringworks

Stand Up for Your Child

If you have concerns about your child's progress or school experience, speak up! You know your child better than anyone else. Here are some simple things you can do to be involved.

- **Develop a close working relationship with your child's teachers and principal.** Stay in touch between report card periods.



- **Save important test results,** class work samples, homework examples, and other school communications that show how your child usually performs.

- **Ask for help!** If you suspect a problem, talk with your child's teacher. If you still have concerns, talk with the principal, reading specialist, or special education teacher. You have the right to ask questions and to receive answers to the questions you ask. Also, do not hesitate to seek advice outside of the school system.

Your Child Needs You

It's hard to watch your child struggle in school. For more information on how you can help, visit www.ReadingRockets.org/gettinginvolved



What Else Can We Do? Special Education

Even with good classroom teaching and extra help, it's possible that your child may continue to struggle with reading. Special education may be the answer — and it's required by law for students who are identified as having a learning disability. The process includes these steps:

Referral

You or your child's teacher suspects a problem and requests an evaluation by the school.

Evaluation

With input from you and your child's teacher, a team of school professionals completes a full evaluation of your child. This same team — which may include a school psychologist, a speech-language pathologist, and a reading specialist — reviews the results to determine whether your child is eligible to receive special education services.

Eligibility

If yes . . .

You and the school team develop your child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP), as required by law. Annually, or more often, you and the school review the IEP and its impact on your child's progress.

If no . . .

Continue to push the school for help. If your child is not eligible but still struggles with reading, the school must figure out what will work for your child. You can also turn to private testing.

Special Ed In-Depth

For more information about special education, visit www.ReadingRockets.org/specialeducation

Learn More

Educating yourself is one of the most important things you can do for your child. Here are some ways to learn more.

Watch

Empowering Parents

with Al Roker

Part of our PBS television series

Reading Rockets: Launching Young Readers

To watch for free online, please visit

www.ReadingRockets.org/empowerparents

To order a VHS or DVD, please call **1-800-228-4630** or visit

www.ReadingRockets.org/store



Other episodes with useful information include

The Roots of Reading, with Fred Rogers

Sounds & Symbols, with Annette Bening

Fluent Reading, with Deborah Norville

Writing & Spelling, with Vivica A. Fox

Reading for Meaning, with Frank McCourt

Becoming Bilingual, with Rita Moreno

Read

Overcoming Dyslexia

By Sally Shaywitz

New York: Vintage Books, 2003.

Parenting a Struggling Reader

By Susan L. Hall and Louisa C. Moats

New York: Broadway Books, 2002.

Starting Out Right:

A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success

By the National Research Council

Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1999.



Go Online

www.ReadingRockets.org

A continuously updated Web site with tips for parents and guidance for educators on teaching kids to read and helping those who struggle.

www.pbs.org/launchingreaders

Includes additional interviews with experts and other extras from the making of this television series.

www.LDOnLine.org

The leading Web site on learning disabilities for parents, teachers, and other professionals.

www.ColorinColorado.org

Bilingual information, activities, and advice for Spanish-speaking parents helping young children learn to read in English — plus a comprehensive section for English-speaking teachers.

¡En español!



Empower Your Child!

Your child can hear from other kids who've struggled with reading on **Reading Rocks!**, an upbeat TV show hosted by the Disney Channel's Nick Spano. Watch for free online at www.ReadingRockets.org/readingrocks

About

Reading Rockets

Reading Rockets is a multimedia project that looks at how young kids learn to read, why so many struggle, and what we can do to help.

To learn more, please visit us on the Web at www.ReadingRockets.org, where you can download free print guides, subscribe to our monthly electronic newsletter, and access hundreds of research-based articles about helping your child with reading.

To order Reading Rockets television programs and print materials, please visit www.ReadingRockets.org/store, or call **1-800-228-4630**.

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Empowering Parents, hosted by Al Roker, is part of the award-winning public television series **Reading Rockets: Launching Young Readers**. This companion guide will give you tips and advice on raising your own young reader.

For information in Spanish,
please visit
www.ColorinColorado.org.

Para información en español,
favor de visitar
www.ColorinColorado.org.



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