

HOW TO GIVE YOUR CHILD A LIFELONG LOVE OF READING

5 WAYS TO ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO READ

1) **MAKE IT ENJOYABLE** – whatever you plan to do, the most important thing is that reading doesn't become a grind or, even worse, a punishment. Children become readers when they find a book they enjoy and once books make them happy, they're hooked for life. So don't discourage them from re-reading an old favourite or an old Beano annual, and don't keep encouraging them to read something you loved as a child if they're not keen. Guide and suggest, but as far as possible, let them make the choice themselves. I love Alan Garner's books. My children don't. That's absolutely fine.

2) **KEEP IT VARIED** – whether it's a novel or a poem, a history book or a science guide, a travelogue or a comic, diaries or jokes, a biography or a picture book, variety is the spice of reading life. As I write, library services are understandably patchy so it's worth checking online before heading to your nearest branch. If you don't have titles at home, then ebooks are an option and if you are able to support them, bookshops will happily send you books in the post. But there's a lot to explore online too. For example, explore Poetryline run by the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education at clpe.org.uk/poetryline or search online for the work of performance poets such as Kate Tempest and Caleb Femi.

3) **READ OUT LOUD** – this is important to do in normal times, but now everybody is unsettled this kind of personal together is a particularly excellent way of comforting your child. You absolutely don't have to be a professional actor to read out loud, but do put plenty of emotion into it (I've always enjoyed doing 'voices' even though they are often truly laughable) and don't go too fast. Older children who have not been read to for a while might also now enjoy this again.

4) **DISCUSS THE BOOKS** – Chatting about books is a huge part of the reading experience and enjoyable for both you and your child. Ask questions which make them think about what they're reading or encourage them to look for answers in another book, rather than simply broadcasting information at them (but remember they're not doing a school test on it so don't turn it into an interrogation!). If you're reading something together, don't whizz through it as fast as possible, but pause regularly to discuss issues which it raises and connections to other books your child may have read. Think of yourself as a 'reading mentor' rather than a broadcaster.

5) **AUDIOBOOKS ARE BOOKS TOO** – People not only learn in different styles – visual, auditory or kinesthetic (learning by doing) – but they also enjoy stories in different ways. Traditional books don't suit everybody and audiobooks should certainly not be seen as some kind of fraudulent replacement for a hardback in the hand. Storytelling, after all, is far older than reading a printed book. The biggest commercial player in the audiobook market is Audible, owned by Amazon, Listening Books (www.listening-books.org.uk)

FINALLY, ONE FOR YOU – read yourself. Not only is that great for you, if your children see you reading then they are much more likely to follow your lead.

ALEX JOHNSON