



PARENT RESOURCE

How to Build a Love of Reading in the Early Years

The Start of Something Extraordinary



HOW TO BUILD A LOVE OF READING IN THE EARLY YEARS

The early years, from the time a child is born through to the end of Year 2, represent the most significant window for building a love of literature. Not just the mechanics of it, but the *joy* of it. And that distinction matters more than many parents realise.

This guide is for parents of young children who want to do more than teach their daughter to decode words. It's for those who want to raise a reader.

WHY THE EARLY YEARS ARE THE WINDOW THAT MATTERS MOST

The human brain is not equally receptive to language learning at every stage of life. Research consistently shows that the period from birth to age eight is when the brain builds the neural architecture for reading. It is when it is making the connections between spoken language, print, and meaning. These pathways and connections underpin everything from comprehension to vocabulary to academic confidence.

Children who develop strong early literacy skills acquire new words and knowledge faster, which in turn strengthens their reading further. The gap between children who love reading and those who don't widens quickly, and it typically begins not with instruction, but with exposure. This disparity starts with those who are read to, and those who are not. Children who have had three picture books read a day to them enter Kindergarten will have heard nearly a million more words than those who have not. This exposure to language is significant and so is the impact to learning.

What this means in practical terms: the habits and environment you build at home in these years have a lasting, measurable impact on your child's academic trajectory.

FIVE WAYS TO BUILD A LOVE OF READING AT HOME

1. Keep Reading Aloud Long After They Can Read Themselves

Many parents stop reading aloud to their children once they start reading independently. This is one of the most common and consequential mistakes in early literacy development.

Reading aloud to your child does several things that independent reading cannot. It exposes them to vocabulary and sentence structures that are beyond their current reading level, which builds comprehension capacity. It models fluency and expression and the musicality of language in a way that text on a page cannot convey. And perhaps most importantly, it creates a shared emotional experience around books.

Children whose parents read to them regularly and well into primary school consistently demonstrate stronger reading comprehension and a more positive attitude toward reading.

Try this: Choose a chapter book just slightly beyond your child's reading level and read a chapter together before bed, a few nights a week. The suspense of stopping mid-chapter is a surprisingly powerful motivator.

2. Choose Books that are Appropriate to Your Child's Reading Ability

When reading, it is important for a child to read at a level that is appropriate for their development. When a book is well matched to your child's ability, they can read with high accuracy – recognising most words without constant struggle. This builds confidence and allows their brain to focus on understanding the story rather than decoding every word.

Fluency is equally important. When children read smoothly, with expression and appropriate pace, it shows they are making meaning as they go. Reading that is too difficult often sounds slow and laboured; reading that is too easy does not stretch growth. The “just right” level provides healthy challenge while still allowing success.

Most importantly, comprehension is the goal of all reading. When children understand what they read, they can discuss ideas, make connections and think critically. Choosing texts at the right level nurtures skill, stamina and a lifelong love of reading.

Try This: When listening to your child read, listen for any errors, the pace and the expression to identify if the book is an appropriate level of difficulty.

3. Build a Reading Environment at Home

A child needs to marinate daily in new vocabulary and literature. Children read more when books are physically present, accessible, and treated as ordinary household objects rather than special items kept out of reach. A dedicated bookshelf at child height, books left on the kitchen bench, a basket of picture books next to the couch – these small environmental cues signal that reading is a normal part of daily life.

Limit the competition. Screens are designed by teams of engineers to be maximally compelling. Books cannot compete on that playing field. The physical environment of your home, what is easily available and what requires effort to access, shapes habits quietly and consistently.

Try this: Designate one room or corner as a reading space: a beanbag, good lighting, and a rotating selection of books at eye level. Make it the most comfortable seat in the house.

4. Connect Books to the Real World

One of the most effective ways to build reading motivation is to demonstrate that books are relevant; that they explain things your child is already curious about, and that stories connect to real feelings and real experiences.

After a trip to the beach, find a picture book about the ocean. Before a visit to a grandparent, read a story about family. When your daughter is nervous about starting kindy, find a character who felt the same way and worked through it.

This approach builds what educators call reading purpose and to develop the understanding that books are not just ‘for school’ but tools for making sense of the world.

Try this: Keep a loose habit of “finding the book” for any new experience or question your child expresses. It doesn't need to be formal, just a quiet message that curiosity has a home in books.

5. Make Reading Visible

One of the most influential things you can do to nurture a strong reader is to let your child see you reading. Children learn as much from what we model as from what we say. When they regularly observe you reading a book, the news, a recipe or even instructions, they begin to understand that reading is not just a school task but it is a meaningful and valued part of everyday life.

Being seen reading sends powerful messages: that reading is enjoyable, useful and worth making time for. It builds a culture of literacy in the home and reinforces the idea that learning continues beyond the classroom. When children grow up in environments where reading is normal and visible, they are more likely to view themselves as readers too.

Even small, consistent habits like a few quiet minutes with a book in the evening can shape attitudes. Your example helps cultivate motivation, curiosity and a lifelong relationship with reading.

Try this: Take 20 minutes on a weekend afternoon where the whole family sits to listen to a book, or reads independently as an activity. Share what you have each read.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL

The environment a child spends six hours a day in shapes her relationship with reading as significantly as her home. When evaluating a school's approach to early literacy, consider the following:

What to look for	Why it matters
Specialist reading / literacy programs	Targeted support for different reading stages
A well-resourced school library	Access to a wide range of genres and levels
A visible culture of reading - reading corners, book displays, reading events	Environmental cues that reading is valued
Balance of phonics instruction and literature experience	Strong decoding skills <i>and</i> a love of stories
Regular read-aloud time in the classroom, beyond Year 1	Modelling of fluency and comprehension strategies

A school that treats literacy as foundational and not just as a subject will invest in the physical space, specialist staffing, and daily routines that make reading a central part of a child's experience, not just a lesson on the timetable.

A FINAL THOUGHT

The children who become lifelong readers are rarely those who were drilled the hardest. They are the ones who were shown, early and often, that books are where adventures live, that stories help us understand ourselves, and that reading is something the people around them love to do.

You don't need a special program or an expert curriculum to begin. You need a library card, a comfortable chair, and the willingness to read one more chapter before the light goes out.

Interested in how St Hilda's approaches literacy in the early years? Explore our [Teaching and Learning Philosophy](#), or [book a Junior School tour](#) to see our learning environment in person. You're also welcome to [contact our Admissions team](#) to discuss enrolment and what to expect from the transition to school.

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