

How Parents Can Best Help Their Child

What teachers know and we want all parents to know is that according to a famous study of fifth graders, Anderson, Wilson and Fielding (1998), a strong correlation was found between time spent reading and performance on standardized reading tests.

Students who scored at the 98% on tests read 90.7 minutes a day which is approximately 4, 733,000 words per year. A more recent study conducted in 2007 found the same results. In simple terms, **the more a child reads the better reader they become**. It is very important that children develop a love of reading. Please help your child develop this love of reading. You can read to your child, have them read to you, take turns reading pages, paragraphs or sentences. We want the child to experience “getting lost in a book.” This is the feeling that you can’t put the book down or can’t wait for the end because you are so involved in the story or for younger children, love the book so much they have to read it over and over.

Percentage rank on test	Minutes read per day	Estimated number of words read per year
98%	90.7	4,733,000
90%	40.4	2,357,000
70%	21.7	1,168,000
50%	12.9	601,000
20%	3.1	134,000

It doesn’t matter how many times a child reads the same book. It is good practice. We encourage students to use the 5 finger rule to determine if the book is just right for them. They should be able to explain the 5 finger rule to you.

The biggest problem students have with comprehension of what they read is lack of **background knowledge**. For example, if you have never watched a baseball game, reading a story about baseball will be difficult. Parents can help by talking to their children about all kinds of things and letting them experience a variety events. Discussions that take place in the grocery store, at sporting events and even family events such as weddings are learning experiences. Our students who are avid watchers of the Discovery Channel are quite well informed on many topics. Background knowledge is also developed through reading. It is helpful if you discuss what your child is reading with them to develop this understanding of what they have read. One of the benefits of your child being an avid reader is that they can experience many places and events through their reading. For example, a child who reads a book about moving or going to the hospital will be much better prepared for this experience before it occurs. It is a great way to learn about how other people feel and think and then the child develops their own opinions.

There are also many studies that state that it takes about **21 days to form a new habit**. It really only takes about 15 minutes a day to form this habit. So reading and talking to your child for about 15 minutes a day for 21 days will make that event a good habit that will result in increased learning for your child. This same 21 days for 15 minutes can apply to increasing their self-esteem, doing their homework, packing their lunch and talking about your day. Doing this activity at the same time and in the same place increases the “cementing” of this habit.

There also is important new research that links chronic **sleep** deprivation and childhood obesity. The reasons for this link are numerous, medically complex and yet to be fully understood. The hormone Ghrelin, which signals hunger, is released at high levels while Leptin, which signals satiety or fullness, is suppressed. There is also a link between chronic sleep deprivation and academic achievement. Many parents do not know how many hours of sleep are recommended for children. The difference of even 15 minutes can lead to behavior, social and academic difficulties. For children, what they learn during the day is moved to long-term memory while they sleep. Children spend ten times more than adults in slow-wave stage of sleep when long and short term memories are formed, information and data learned during the day is catalogued and archived in meaningful ways and neural connections are strengthened. Children ages 4-6 require 10.5 to 12 hours per night of sleep for proper brain function. Children ages 7-12 require 10-11 hours/night and adolescents ages 12-18 require a minimum of 8.25 hours/night.

Finally, **nutrition and exercise** are the areas that parents can most impact. Children should get 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise every day to maintain healthy bodies and brains. Generous estimates nationwide predict that fewer than 20% of our children are getting this every day. Obesity has become a national catastrophe. Obesity is the host to serious, potentially deadly medical problems including Type II diabetes, hypertension, vascular disease, stroke, cancer and heart disease. Doctors are seeing an increase in these diseases usually occurring in adults, now appearing in children. Adults need to make sure children are eating less processed foods—fast food is killing us—and more fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean protein into every meal and by removing highly processed, fried and sugar laden items such as breaded chicken, fried items, canned fruit in heavy syrup and pop.

We can work together to ensure the health and success of the next generation and more importantly the happiness of your child. We influence your child only six hours a day for 176 days a year. Your influence is much greater but we are all developing habits to last a life time.