Elementary School • December 2026

BUILDING READERS®

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Parkland School District

Help your elementary schooler overcome reading challenges with simple strategies

Reading is an essential skill that helps students learn almost every subject. When students struggle with reading, it can hurt their overall school progress.

If your elementary schooler is having reading difficulties, try these strategies:



- **Talk to the teacher.** Ask about realistic goals. Is your child reading at grade level? If not, what help is available? What can you do at home to support your child?
- **Use easy books at home.** Choose books that are simple to read and understand. Allow your child to read favorites again and again.
- **Focus on sounds and spelling.** Play games that help your child break words down into individual sounds and connect letters to those sounds to strengthen decoding skills. (See article below for decoding activities to try together.)
- **Take turns reading out loud.** This gives your child a chance to read while you demonstrate how to read smoothly and correctly.

Practice decoding skills at home

Before they can read, children must first learn the sounds that letters make, individually and in common combinations, like *ch*. Next, they learn to decode by sounding out the letters in the word and blending the sounds together.

To add variety to decoding practice:

- **Write words on index cards.** Take turns with your child selecting a card and sounding out the word.
- **Read labels together.** Look at packaged foods in your kitchen. See if your child can sound out the words on the labels.
- **Have a treasure hunt.** Hide words written on slips of paper throughout your home. Have your child find the slips and sound out the words.

Introduce graphic organizers

Graphic organizers are visual charts that help students understand what they read. To make one, have your child:



1. **Draw a large star** with five points.
2. **Write the title** of the story or article in the center.
3. **Use the five points** to write down the *who, what, when, where* and *why* of the text.

Creating this visual tool helps your child think about the reading and organize thoughts in ways that boost comprehension.

Connect to the past with books

On your next trip to the library, suggest your child to browse the shelves for books that add to background knowledge:

- **Biographies and autobiographies** introduce your child to real people and their lives.
- **Books about historical events** help your child learn about the past.
- **Nonfiction books** about historical places and artifacts help your child explore how people lived long ago.

Bookmarks make reading special

Making bookmarks can get your child excited about reading—and bookmarks make great gifts! Gather:



- **Strips of construction paper,** around 6 by 2 inches.
- **Small photos of your child.**
- **Glue and clear tape.**
- **Colored pencils,** markers or crayons.

Have your child decorate bookmarks with drawings or quotes from books. Then, cover with clear packing tape.

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Ask your elementary schooler to be your family's 'reference librarian'

Children need practice searching for accurate information online. Make it fun by asking questions and challenging your child to find the answers about:



- **Space.** Who was the first astronaut to walk on the moon, and what else happened on that mission?
- **History.** What was the largest dinosaur that ever lived, and where did it live?
- **Science.** What happens to the body when people do not get enough sleep?

Tailor the questions to match your child's interests and reading ability. When your child finds the facts, look at the sources and talk together about how to judge if they are reliable or not.

Review language with word games

Children learn grammar and language rules much faster when they use them every day. Play these word games to make practice fun:



- **Adjective challenge.** Take turns brainstorming descriptive words for something, like a rainy day (*wet, misty, damp, overcast*). See how many words your child can think of.
- **Pronoun practice.** Use pronouns like *I, me, we* and *us* in sentences. Take turns guessing if sentences are grammatically correct. "My friends and I will go" (correct) versus "My friends and me will go." (incorrect).
- **Word parts.** Define prefixes and suffixes, the beginning and ending parts of words which add meaning to a base word. For example, the prefix *non-* means "not" (*nonstop*), and the suffix *-ful* means "having" (*healthful*).



Q: My third grader has always enjoyed reading, but has started complaining about books being "boring." What can I do to make sure my child doesn't lose interest?

A: Your child may be choosing books that are too easy. Many third graders can handle increasingly intricate story lines. Go to the library and help your child find some new books on topics of interest that also include some challenging words. If you're not sure where to start, ask your child's teacher for recommendations.

Suggest graphic novels

Graphic novels are popular with students. Many address relevant and complex issues. They also cover many types of literature, including mystery, history, fantasy and nonfiction.

Ask the librarian or the teacher to suggest one your child might enjoy.



For lower elementary readers:

- ***The Cloud Spinner*** by Michael Catchpool. A boy weaves beautiful fabric from the clouds. But there are consequences when a king demands too much clothing.
- ***The Day the Crayons Came Home*** by Drew Daywalt. A new bunch of crayons have a bone to pick with Duncan. Your child will delight in these crayons' gripes!



For upper elementary readers:

- ***Romeow and Drooliet*** by Nina Laden. This clever adaptation of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet features a cat and dog as the star-crossed lovers.
- ***The Spaghetti Detectives*** by Andreas Steinhöfel. Rico and Oscar are an interesting pair who take on a number of mysteries to solve.

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