

How To Teach Your Child to Use the Library

By Cathy Smith

Introducing your children to the wonders of the library can be an important step in forming a lifelong love of learning. Most public libraries feature a wide selection of children's books and magazines as well as audio and videocassettes. Many local libraries also have reading programs and seminars to help children become more familiar with the services available.

Preschoolers shouldn't be excluded from library visits. They can choose picture books and videotapes and may enjoy participating in story hours designed for their age group.

School age children should be taken on a tour of the library. Explain how they can use the magazine section to find information on current events and special topics. Also show them nonfiction books and biographies that can be used to research information for homework assignments. They should also be taught how to use the library catalog, periodical guides, and reference books.

Many young children may not understand why they are supposed to be quiet when visiting the library. Explain that other people are reading and working and that the library is not the place for loud talking and roughhousing. You should also explain safety precautions children should take when using the library on their own or with friends after school. Stress the importance of being cautious with strangers in a public place and let them know they should report any inappropriate or suspicious behavior to the librarian or security guard.

Find out if your library offers library cards for children or if they will have to check out books using your card. If your child is eligible for a card, teach him to keep it in a safe place and to always save book receipts with the due dates. Children should be taught not to mark the pages and to

use bookmarks instead of folding down pages. Let them know that they will have to pay for damaged or lost books out of their allowance.

Some libraries offer reading programs where children can explore special topics or earn certificates and awards for reading a certain group or number of books. Ask your librarian for a list of award-winning children's books, or request a copy of books recommended by the American Library Association and the Library of Congress.

When you visit the library with your child, be sure to choose a few books for yourself. If your child sees that you like reading, he will be more inclined to imitate your actions and set aside time for recreational reading. Talk with your children about books that you loved as a child. Whether you were a fan of the Nancy Drew series, *Black Beauty*, or *The Wizard of Oz*, your children will enjoy hearing about books that you enjoyed.

Many librarians have anecdotes to tell about college students or adults who have walked into the library with no clue how to find information or use the materials available. Teaching your children to use the library at an early age will help them learn valuable research skills that can stimulate the desire to learn and prepare them to handle more difficult assignments in high school, college and in the workplace.

Be sure to inquire about services offered for children who are blind or hearing impaired. Your librarian may also refer you to special programs for those who need remedial help.

Some libraries offer seminars and special assistance to help students who are working on term papers. Attending these sessions can give your child more information on making the best use of all library resources. Older students may need to do reports that require researching information from past editions of newspapers or magazines. Show them how to use the library's periodical files or ask the librarian to demonstrate how to find a particular newspaper article from a specific

year and date. Teenagers should also be taught how to use the materials in the library for researching colleges, financial aid and careers.

Many libraries have book sales where you can pick up books and magazines for as little as 25 cents to \$1.00. Let your children browse through the offerings for books they might like to add to the family bookshelf.

Children are taught to read in school and given assignments, but there is a big difference between reading a book for homework and reading for enjoyment. Reading a variety of books for pleasure can help children exercise their imaginations and introduce them to worlds they never knew existed. Instilling a love for reading is one of the most important things you can do as a parent.

