

Children become good readers one book at a time. But how do you help a child choose the right books? You don't have to be an expert in reading levels to guide a child to books that entertain, enlighten, and challenge (without overwhelming).

You may be accustomed to choosing books for the children in your life. But did you know that selecting a book is a useful skill that a child can and should learn? Choosing a book independently teaches a child that we seek books for different reasons. With some simple strategies, you can help a child to be a savvy book selector. You also can help him or her choose books that are neither too easy nor too hard. Much like Goldilocks found when she crashed at the three bears' house, the books a child picks can be *just right!*

As early as you can, introduce the idea that we read for a purpose, even if that purpose is pure enjoyment. Ask the child: What type of book are you looking for today—and why? With older children you can ask: Are you looking for fiction (made up) or nonfiction (factual)? Ask them to explain their choice.

1. Encourage a child to spend time browsing a selection of books at a library or bookstore. If this is overwhelming try organizing the books you already have at home and letting your child browse through them. You can separate them by fiction (made-up stories) and nonfiction (factual). Or you can put them in different bins by ability level or type (picture books, chapter books, and so on). Talk about the type of book in each container.
2. Give the child authority over choosing books to read. Say “yes” as often as you can. A book that the child wants to read is the one you want to take home. Don't worry if a book seems short, too easy, or has pictures. Graphic novels (stories told in comic book frames) are a great way to hook a reluctant reader.
3. Let the child know it's OK if he or she doesn't like a particular book. Use a not-so-great selection as an opportunity to understand more about reading skills and preferences. Could it be the book was just a little too difficult for the child to tackle alone? Here's a simple rule of thumb for younger readers: Let them keep track of how many words they didn't know. If they count five or more on a page, the book was probably too challenging for an independent read..
4. If the child really wants to read something you know is beyond his or her ability, solve it by reading it aloud together. You can take turns reading and define unfamiliar words as you

go. That way the child will avoid the frustration and enjoy the added bonus of your company!

5. If you'd like to know more about what's recommended for a child's age and grade, visit your local library or bookstore. Browse the sections, which usually group books based on the reader's skill level. Ask questions there, too. And look at a book's back cover for info about the age the publisher had in mind. A child's teacher or school librarian can be a great source, too. Not only do these folks know what's age-appropriate, they usually know the hot books among kids. If they can't keep it on the library shelves, chances are your child will like it!
  
6. If the child has really enjoyed a book, look for other books by the same author.

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