

# ***10 ways to encourage beginning reading in an Emirati home***

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## **Introduction:**

Parents worldwide play a significant role in the development of their children's reading (Trelease, 2006). Yet, the fostering of home reading practices seems to be a challenge in both the United Arab Emirates and wider Arab world (Mograby, 1999; Al Tanejji, 2001; Taha-Thomure, 2003; Hyland, 2003). Learning to read takes practice, more practice than children get during the school day. Schools that genuinely want to create readers can't do it without parental involvement. As teachers in the UAE, we need to think of how we can ensure Arabic parents feel able enough to help at home, especially when much of their children's reading is in a foreign language. Providing them with ideas that are manageable and stimulating is a good starting point. This article makes ten simple suggestions on how to encourage Emirati parents to get involved in their child's literacy at home.

### **1. Create a print-rich environment**

Keep a wide selection of reading materials—books, magazines and newspapers, and create a print-rich environment at home. Low shelves that children can reach easily, or specially decorated boxes close to somewhere comfortable to sit will encourage children into the habit of exploring books by themselves. Point out letter-sound relationships to children on labels, boxes and signs. Use a variety of everyday situations to develop children's reading – shopping, traveling, visiting etc. Be aware of your child's reading interests and try to find books that will be engaging with captivating pictures. Get a subscription in his or her name to an age-appropriate magazine. When relatives and others ask for gift ideas, suggest books or bookstore gift certificates.

### **2. Make reading a ritual**

Make reading a habit for bedtime, after lunch, or after naptime. Having a daily reading routine stimulates a child's reading development and also fuels a close relationship between parent and child. The chances are that this new reading habit will become a popular family affair. Not only does regular reading make little ones feel secure and loved, but they also learn pre-reading skills and begin to recognize letters and words.

### **3. Discover the joy of reading books together**

While you read together, adjust your reading speed to the child's pace. As the child gains fluency and confidence in reading, gradually drop out of the reading. Discuss and make

comments on the story during, and at the end of the reading. Encourage prediction of story events. Remember that the story does not have to be completed in one sitting. An older brother or sister, relative or friend could also be encouraged to participate in reading together. The individual attention, physical closeness and feeling of security will all contribute to the child's feelings about books.

#### **4. Engage in Partnered Reading**

Read the opening sentence aloud, pause and allow the child to read the second sentence. Continue reading alternate lines, paragraph or pages until the story is completed. Comments, opinions and reactions during the story should be encouraged. Let the child see the connection between the written and the spoken word, by running a finger under the words they are reading.

#### **5. Use the Pause, Prompt & Praise technique**

Pause to give your child sufficient time to try to read the word by himself/herself. Prompt if your child is unable to read the word. Use the picture to give hints. Rhyme or sound out the word. Connect it to something your child already knows. Praise your child for his/her efforts, regardless of whether he/she 'gets' the word or not.

#### **6. Read-it again!**

The magic of read-it again is a key feature of reading together with young children. While adults will probably get bored reading and rereading the same handful of books night after night, a child loves the predictability of these familiar books. These are the books the child will memorize and these are likely to be the first books the child will read all by himself. Show enthusiasm as you re-read your child's favourite story, whether it is in English or Arabic.

#### **7. Recite rhymes, poems and songs**

When reciting rhymes, jingles and simple songs either in English or Arabic, encourage children to repeat them, until they know them by heart e.g. 'Twinke, twinkle, little star' (use pictures, objects or actions as memory-joggers). The rhythm of the poem or song will help children to remember the words. Then show them the *words in print* as this will help them to understand the way in which the written word represents the sung or spoken word. Finally encourage children to perform.

#### **8. Play word games**

Word games can provide a relaxed and informal learning situation, free from tension and anxiety. Playing with words is fun and promotes the idea that learning to read is enjoyable. Games include 'I spy with my little eye', 'how many words can you think of that sound like the word...?', 'complete the sentence from the story', 'true or false cards', 'spot the odd word out', 'word bingo and "word snap'. Magnetic letters which stick to the refrigerator are easy to move

around and children can feel the different letter shapes with their hands, thus helping them to distinguish each letter and make new words.

### **9. Visit the library**

Once children can read by themselves they still need continued support and encouragement if they are to develop into keen readers, especially in a foreign language. One way of tempting children into reading is to make a routine visit to the local library. While libraries are still a relatively new concept in the UAE, two **libraries** to explore are '*The Cultural Foundation Library*', Abu Dhabi and '*The Old Library*', Dubai Community Theatre and Arts Center (DUCTAC) complex, Mall of the Emirates, Sheikh Zayed Rd, Dubai. For more details visit <http://www.theoldlibrary.ae/index.htm> Of particular note is the reading session for pre-school children which is conducted in the Old Library every Sunday morning. Ensure to go when you are not in a rush, so that your child has lots of time to explore the wonderful world of books. Choosing from a wide range of books, without the pressure of buying, gives children more freedom to experiment and therefore to become more discriminating. Ask the librarian to explain how to use the catalogue system, if necessary so that together you can find books by a particular author or on a particular topic.

### **10. Make reading fun**

Make reading fun by discussing exciting incidents, funny characters, or adding to the story itself. Dramatize the story where possible, using song, mime, puppets or props. Purchase, make or take on loan from school a storysack (Griffiths, 2001), (a large cloth bag containing a storybook with supporting materials, such as puppets, soft toys of the main characters and a game to stimulate reading/language skills). Make the story as personal as possible by including your child, your family or pet in the story. Don't persist with a book that is uninteresting. Make the reading session short and show your own enjoyment! For commercially produced Storysacks, as well as tips on how to use the sacks visit: <http://www.storysack.com/>

### **Conclusion:**

The move toward a home reading culture among Emirati families is not likely to be an easy one. By providing information leaflets on how to read with their child at home and offering helpful suggestions, such as the ten tips outlined in this article, along with more extensive professional development courses to parents - this will be the first step in a professional journey that requires the nourishing conditions to support the encouragement of reading in an Arabic home. By reading to their child, reading with their child, and listening to their child read, by modeling good reading behaviours and providing appropriate literacy activities for their child, parents can give their child the gift of literacy which is paramount in meeting the challenges he or she will face in the future. Few countries in the world have experienced the development seen in the UAE over the past 30 years; it remains to be seen how that progress

will help foster a literate and literary population. Perhaps the current generation will begin to develop the habit of reading to their children at home and promote the educational values that will sustain future generations.

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