

**How to Support
Your Adolescent's
Literacy Development**

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What do Literacy Coaches do?

Instruction: “What appears to be most effective is for the *literacy* specialist’s instruction to support, supplement, and extend excellent classroom teaching (Pikulski, 1994). Such a view calls for the specialist and classroom teacher to work collaboratively to implement a quality literacy program that is research-based and meets the needs of students.”

Assessment: “*Literacy* specialists have specialized knowledge of assessment and diagnosis that is vital for developing, implementing, and evaluating the literacy program in general, and in designing instruction for individual students.”

Leadership: “The leadership role is multidimensional. All *literacy* specialists need to be a resource to other educators, parents, and the community. They also aid teachers by suggesting ideas, strategies, or materials that can enhance instruction.”

-From IRA Position Paper on Roles of Reading (Literacy) Specialists

FCH2 and FCH3 Literacy Coach:

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10. Encourage and model a positive attitude about writing.

The name of the game is encourage, encourage, encourage. Just as you didn't correct every word that came out of your child's mouth as he or she was learning to talk, you don't want to correct every word that emerges on paper – even if it's spelled wrong.

- Talk to your adolescent about the writing. Tell him or her what you enjoyed about it.
- Delight with your adolescent over specific words, creative ideas, captivating images.
- Ask questions about content.
- Most of all, help your adolescent to feel as if writing is fun!

Some ideas excerpted from *Because Writing Matters* from the California Writing Project and Parent Resources on the National Writing Project page
http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/doc/resources/encourage_writing.csp

Family Literacy Web Sites:

American Library Association: www.ala.org

Thinkfinity Literacy Network: <http://literacynetwork.verizon.org/Parent-Resources.196.0.html>

National Center for Family Literacy: www.famlit.org

Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy:
www.barbarabushfoundation.com

What Challenges are Adolescents Facing upon Entering the Adult World?

“Adolescents entering the adult world in the 21st century will read and write more than at any other time in human history. They will need advanced levels of literacy to perform their jobs, run their households, act as citizens, and conduct their personal lives. They will need literacy to cope with the flood of information they will find everywhere they turn. They will need literacy to feed their imaginations so they can create the world of the future. In a complex and sometimes even dangerous world, their ability to read will be crucial. Continual instruction beyond the early grades is needed.”

--Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999,
Position Statement from the International Reading Association

How Can Parents Help Adolescents Face these Challenges?

The middle school and high school years are when your child really becomes a competent reader, writer and learner. Be active in your child's school learning and provide opportunities that continue learning in the home. Find your child's strengths and encourage her to use and build on them. Participate in school activities, and talk to your child about these experiences. Continue to give your teenager gifts of writing materials and books that interest her, and remind her of the importance of using libraries and the Internet to gain useful information. Talk about newspaper articles and books you both read, and write each other letters and notes. Communicate to your teen about the importance of education, and encourage her to share both learning successes and problems with you.

Creating an Environment to Help Your Adolescent Become a Better Reader:

1. Read to your adolescent.

Try to find time every day to read to your children—even the older ones. Let them choose their favorite books. Take time to discuss what you're reading.

Ask questions that need more than just yes or no answers:

- Why did the characters do what they did?
- What would you do in that situation?
- Did you like the way the story ended? Why or why not?

You can engage adolescents in longer books and create interest and anticipation by reading one part each day. Give adolescents turns at reading parts of the book to you. Choose quiet times to read, after sports or activities or before bed.

2. Read with your adolescent.

Read together and stop once in a while to talk about what each of you is reading and why you like it. You can also read the newspaper together to follow a favorite sports team or read movie reviews.

3. Read in front of your adolescent.

Be a model - show your adolescent how *your* interests relate to reading. Find time to pick up your magazine or book and encourage your son or daughter to choose one of his or her own.

4. Expect and encourage your adolescent to read independently.

When you and your teen are out together, browse in a bookstore or library.

Go your separate ways and make your own selections. A bookstore gift certificate is a nice way of saying, "You choose."

- Provide time to read
- Provide place and space for reading
- Provide tools and resources for reading

7. Acknowledge your adolescent's interests.

- Write to a favorite athlete, author or actor.
- Write a wish list for an upcoming holiday or birthday. Encourage your child to do research on the gift they would like to receive and to include the research with the list.
- Ask your child to make a list of the errands you are running that day that he or she can check off as you go.
- Respond to an article in the newspaper by writing a letter to the editor.

8. Give adolescents control when writing.

When writers move to the step of sharing their writing with outside audiences, they become increasingly concerned about the conventions of the language (spelling, punctuation, capitalization, etc.). The best time to talk to a young writer about the importance of these conventions is at that point – when they are ready to share the piece with other audiences. One way to do this is to talk with them about the reasons we have conventions in the first place – so that another person will understand the meaning behind a writer's great ideas. Showing your writer how to correct spelling, grammar, etc., *in the context of his or her own writing*, is the best way to learn and retain those conventions. Remember, proofread **with**, not **for** your student.

9. Connect writing to reading and to other forms of communication, such as speaking and visually representing, listening and viewing.

- Educational games increase your growing writer's word power.
- Along with having the overnight read-in, turn it into a time for adolescents to craft and tell their own tales.
- Writing and telling the ultimate ghost story or mystery during Halloween--often adolescents have outgrown the trick-or-treat adventure, but desire a positive outlet to replace the lost privilege. Get the video camera out and have them turn their chilling writing into big screen horror or suspense.
- Writing and telling their own holiday stories.
- Adolescents involved in sports can create multimedia-season books! Using CDs, MP3s, or Pod-casts students can create a montage of writing, film-footage, and music that captures the essence of their team.

4. Expect and encourage your adolescent to write independently.

- Provide time to write
- Provide a place and space for writing
- Provide tools and resources for writing

5. Provide an environment that supports writing.

Writing is much easier if you have everything you need. Provide your child with as many choices for writing equipment as possible:

- Paper of different sizes and colors
- Pencils, pens and markers
- Dictionary, thesaurus, style manuals, etc.
- Erasers, scissors, stamps, stickers, etc.

It's also easier to write if you have a good writing space: a desk or table that is a designated writing spot with good lighting and a comfortable chair.

6. Seek out real opportunities and audiences for writing beyond school.

Writing becomes very meaningful for most adolescents when it's authentic.

You can create these real situations out of most anything:

- Ask your adolescent to write a grocery list for the items he or she wants from the store, or from a recipe he or she likes.
- Encourage your adolescent to write a letter to a friend or family member who has moved.
- Suggest your child write a schedule of a day at school so that you can imagine him or her during the day.
- Encourage your child to write a letter to a teacher or principal or another child if something happens that is distressing...or exciting.
- Write a letter of complaint to a company when a toy breaks or a product doesn't work the way it should.
- Enter a writing contest. See teenink.com, writersdigest.com or search the Internet.
- Write holiday letters (not just Christmas) to friends/family narrating the events surrounding the holiday. This may include "gift" writing for a birthday, anniversary, graduation or other special occasion.
- Publish a newsletter for the neighborhood.
- Create a book about a favorite family event or a favorite oral bedtime story.

5. Provide an environment that supports reading.

Adolescents often want their own place to keep books that have special meaning for them. By encouraging adolescents to set aside their personal favorites, you are helping them express their affection and respect for books.

- Include both books (and books on tape) and writing materials
- Include newspapers and child-oriented versions of popular magazines (e.g., *Time for Kids*, *National Geographic for Kids*)

Leave books, magazines, and newspapers around. Check to see what disappears for a clue to what interests your teenager.

6. Seek out real purposes and reasons for reading beyond school.

Household chores can be enjoyable when reading is involved. Here are some ideas for reading during everyday tasks.

- Cooking involves lots of reading, including recipes, labels, and shopping lists.
- Sewing requires following a pattern.
- Using an Internet search engine allows students to find information.
- Reading the directions on cleaning products or appliances will teach adolescents how to use instructions.

7. Acknowledge your adolescent's interest.

Look for books and articles that feature their favorite sports teams, rock stars, hobbies or TV shows. Give a gift subscription to a special interest magazine. Visit the American Library Association list for *Best Books for Young Adults*:

<http://www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/booklistsawards/bestbooksya/bestbooksyoung.htm>

8. Give adolescents choices in reading material.

The local library is a great place for adolescents to explore the world of knowledge and imagination. Frequently visit the public library and explore all it has to offer. Make sure your adolescent is familiar with:

- How to use the catalog to find out what resources the library has on a particular subject;
- Where materials are located in the library;
- Ideas for good books of a particular type for a particular age; and
- Which tools to use to find information, and how to use them.

9. Connect reading to writing and to other forms of communication, such as listening and viewing, speaking and visually representing.

- Entire families can play educational games such as *Scrabble*, *Boggle*, *Concentration*, *Trivial Pursuit*, and *Jeopardy*.
- Instead of hosting a slumber party, host an overnight read-in. Activities might include storytelling, puppetry, reading games, or creative drama. Between each activity, silent reading should take place for a few minutes. Provide nutritious snacks and drinks periodically throughout the evening. The final night activity of the read-in could be a closed-captioned movie—a movie to read, hear, and see—followed by “lights out.”

10. Encourage and model a positive attitude about reading.

For all sorts of reasons, some teenagers go through periods without showing much interest in reading. Don't panic! Time, and a few tips from this brochure, may help rekindle their interest.

Excerpted from

International Reading Association parent resources:

<http://www.reading.org/InformationFor/Parents.aspx>

Reading is Fundamental:

<http://www.rif.org/us/literacy-resources/articles/literacy-rich-environments.htm>

Creating an Environment to Help Your Adolescent Become a Better Writer:

1. Write to your adolescent.

Adolescents love to receive mail, and letters, email or notes from you model the value of writing. Try these ideas:

- Drop a note in your child's lunch box
- Tape a message to the refrigerator
- Put a letter under the pillow (especially if you will be away at bedtime)
- Write a note of congratulations when they have achieved something special
- Write them a poem or note on their birthday each year

2. Write with your adolescent.

Adolescents love to work, play and learn together! Make writing a part of the family social structure. Together you can write stories or poems or lists. One of the best ways to write together is to keep a journal. You might want to try these:

- A *family journal* in which each member of the family writes in the journal one day a week about what is happening at home, school or work.
- A *vacation journal* in which each family member writes about a different day of vacation.
- A *scrapbook* from a vacation, soccer season, school year, etc. that combines photographs, drawings and narration/captions.
- A *reading response journal* in which you and your child write letters to each other about a common book you are reading. This can also be done with another family member or friend.

3. Write in front of your adolescent.

You are your child's first and best teacher! When an adolescent sees literacy modeled in the home that becomes the norm for him or her. So, let your son or daughter see you write...

- Grocery lists
- Letters to friends
- Holiday cards
- Poems
- Reports for work or school