

HOW TO BE A READING CHAMPION

Collaborating across your community to give early literacy a boost

Did you know?

Exposing young children to reading helps develop vocabulary fluency and comprehension. Reading to children for 20 minutes a day adds up, exposing them to 1.8 million words a year!

What is a reading champion?

Anyone can be a Reading Champion. Reading Champions are reading role models and advocates for the importance of reading. They are passionate about reading, well informed of the research and benefits of reading, and are highly motivated implementers of activities that spread awareness and give early literacy a boost. Reading Champions seek out partnerships with other organizations across the community to support their literacy efforts or do joint projects.



How do reading champions support literacy?

Positive early-literacy experiences—whether at home, in early-childhood programs, schools, or libraries—set children on a trajectory to become confident readers by the time they reach third grade, which is an important milestone on the pathway toward high school graduation. Reading champions support literacy by building partnerships with organizations in their community and supporting those organizations to incorporate reading into their everyday activities. Children's foundations for literacy and school success can be fostered in the home, libraries, childcare programs, preschools and other community-based settings; each offering an opportunity to reach children through **Together, We Read**. Many groups across the community are already reaching children and doing good things on their own or have great ideas that they simply cannot execute on their own. Reading Champions offer support to boost existing activities that improve children and parents' success in reading and engaging with literacy activities together.

Community partners and how reading champions can support them:

Libraries:

Visiting the library is an important way to promote children's language and literacy development. In addition to free books and digital resources, libraries often offer story times and other parent-child learning opportunities. Research shows that kindergartners who visit libraries with their families perform better on multi-subject assessments in third grade than those who rarely visit. Speak with your local librarian to determine how you can better extend the library's services to families with young children. Here are some ideas for how Reading Champions can partner with libraries:

- Organize a program in which members volunteer to read to children each week modeling good reading behavior and strategies for staff and parents.
- Connect families with young children to the library and help them access the library as a resource for children's books.
- Create and distribute library kits (please refer to the reading kits activation document for more information on library kits) for parents with young children.

- Help provide or underwrite transportation to the library for families that lack access. Ask whether any children have special transportation needs such as a wheelchair lift and try to link them with an escort who can meet those needs.
- Establish a bookmobile or mobile library that visits community-based locations that serve young children, such as preschools, home day care centers, faith-based organizations and more.
- Consider establishing a bookmobile or mini-library in or near the location where you hold your club meetings.
- Support story times and facilitate the visits of well-known characters (i.e. Clifford the Big Red Dog or Mother Goose) as well as community leaders to the library to read.

Early Educators, Childcare Providers & Non-formal Programs : (Including family child care, center-based care, home-based care, family, friend, neighbor care, Mommy/Daddy and Me programs, parent/child play groups)

Talk to local childcare providers (home or center-based, Head Start; and Early Head Start, etc.) to determine how you can help improve the quality of their program by supporting and enhancing their literacy efforts. Fostering the communication and connection between parents and providers of care can help improve children's learning and literacy. Ideas for partnering Reading Champions with early education centers and childcare facilities include:

- Organizing a program in which members volunteer to read to children each week modeling good reading behavior and strategies for staff and parents.
- Supporting family and parent engagement in children's learning by providing materials to send home.
- Distribute reading and/or library kits (please refer to the reading kits activation document for more information on library kits).
- Build Little Free Libraries at childcare centers that serve low-income families.
- Work with local restaurants, health care providers, laundromats, and other social services to set up and stock reading corners in their waiting rooms to ensure that the community is filled with language and literature-rich environments.
- Partner with faith leaders to incorporate reading and literacy messages into their sermons, baptisms and baby naming dedications. You can partner to host literacy events for members and distribute information to families with young children.

Local Business:

As a Reading Champion, you can partner with local businesses to support literacy. Ask them to work with you to:

- Give away tip sheets with information about the importance of reading at cash registers, hang posters and signage in windows or in restrooms, and placing table tents or placemats with literacy tips and activities at restaurants.
- Spread awareness to their employees with young children by providing books and resources.