

That First Trip to the Library

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What an exciting time for both parent and child...that first trip to the library! This day marks a new phase in the parent-child relationship, and it is another important part of the great gift good parents give their child...the gift of loving books. As you think about this new phase, here are a few ideas which may help you. Three things will serve you well: preparation, the experience itself, and some follow-up.

Preparation:

When you train a child to behave properly in church or in a restaurant or on a visit to a friend's home, you usually have a little discussion about what is expected of the child. For example, we might explain that "We don't talk to other people in church when the minister is speaking," or "You must stay seated in the restaurant and you don't play in your food." Just as we teach our kids to mind their manners when they visit friends, we need to have some rules for the library. We need to repeat these instructions—or some similar version—each time they embark in the direction of church, the restaurant, the home of a friend, or the library. As parents, we know these messages must be repeated time and time again, until eventually they "sink in." Eventually we see the behavior we have been encouraging.

In **preparation** for the library adventure, we need to discuss

- a) What a library is: a place where there are many, many books for everyone to read.
- b) Where children go and belong in the library: to the children's section where we will see books with pictures that you will like.
- c) How we behave: we look, read, and we whisper if we have to talk so we do not bother others who are reading.
- d) What we do with the books: we take them from the shelf, "read" them carefully, and put them back in a specially marked place.
- e) How we care for the books: We do not tear pages, write in the books, or harm the binding of the books. We don't take crayons, pens or pencils near the books in the library.

Note: when my husband and I were graduate students, our children could not understand why we marked in our books and they could not mark in theirs. We

taught them that study books could be marked but other books could not. We gave each child a special book, which was called her “study book,” and she was permitted to “write” in that one book and only in that one. This saved our encyclopedias, our Great Books Series, and other expensive books from child destruction.

We noticed as we studied in their presence, they often brought their “study books” to the table with us and wrote in them as we read our assigned chapters and underlined the important elements. You might employ this technique if you have children who want to deface the library books with writing implements. Just give them one book which you have purchased that may be written in, and your problem will be solved.

Experience:

Now that everyone is prepared, make the **experience** a true adventure from the moment you leave the house! Talk to the child about where you are going and what you are going to do when you arrive. Describe what they are about to see and how you will explore the children’s section together. Review all the rules of good behavior just before you enter the door. Be prepared to find a child or several children who are not following the rules you have taught. Be sure to reinforce good behavior with your child as the adventure moves forward, explaining that not all children in the section are behaving as well as s/he is and that you are very happy that your child has learned what to do in a library.

Just have fun. Give your child a little freedom to explore. Keep your eye on the child at all times, but this is an occasion when they need to venture into the world unattached to you. Let them choose books to look at. They, of course, will be attracted to the brightly colored covers.

While they are exploring, you will want to have your eyes searching for the Caldecott Medal winners on the shelf. Each Caldecott winner will display a gold medal on the cover which is pretty hard to miss. The library reference desk will probably have a list of these books in a bookmark format, which you can pick up on your way into the children’s section.

The Caldecott Medal is awarded each year by the American Library Association to the book with the best illustrations. Good stories stimulate good illustrations. These winners are among the best of the books available for children of pre-school through eight years of age.

Feel free to select a book or two to read to your child while you are in their special section of the library.

You may find a few you wish to borrow and take home. These would be the ones that your child shows a decided interest in or books that pertain to the child’s current interest, i.e. trains, counting, learning shapes, or puppies and kittens. You

may borrow the books for your child on your library card, or, depending on local customs, the child may be able to acquire a card of his or her own. If you don't have your own card, now is the time to get one and if your child qualifies, by all means, secure a card for the child also. The child will feel so good about the library experience, book selection, and care of the books when a personal card has been issued. You will need to check with the librarian regarding local practice. Some libraries will permit children as young as two or three to have their own cards if the parent signs for it. Some say that as soon as the child can write his/her name, a card will be issued

Follow-up:

When you both have selected books to take home, discuss the experience on the way home. Enjoy hearing the child's version of what has just occurred. This is part of the **follow-up**. Prepare the child for the proper care of the borrowed books during this final stage of the adventure. Explain that when you get home, the two of you will set aside a special place to keep the borrowed books. It can be a special bookshelf, a box in the corner of the child's bedroom, or a corner of a desk or table. It is important to have a place that is for library books only. This practice saves hours of stress when it is time to return the books.

If the child is trained to put his/her books from the library in a certain spot and the in-home personally owned books in another space after reading, you will be ready for the next trip to the library when it is time to return the borrowed treasures. The follow-up phase of the library adventure is just as important as the preparation and the experience itself. You are developing habits that will serve both you and your child for a lifetime.

A final part of the follow-up is the return visit. It is best to set a schedule, if you can, for library visits. The child begins to know and to look forward to this experience. As time goes on, the comfort level in this environment will increase. You can watch the love of books and of the library grow. You know you are producing a reader. Readers are leaders.