



Building a Family Library



What's Involved?

A home library doesn't have to be elaborate or expensive to provide rich reading experiences. Fancy books aren't necessarily the best way to capture a child's imagination. But a good family library does involve time and space—time to find materials that will interest all the readers in the family, and space to keep and enjoy them. Here are some questions that might come to mind as you plan a family library:

Where is the best place to set up our library?

Many families have found that setting aside a spot in the home for a family library helps them make reading a part of family life. You don't need much space; a corner of a room with a bookshelf, comfortable furniture, and adequate lighting is just fine.

How large should our library be?

It's variety that counts, not size. Instead of focusing on the number of books, keep in mind the special interests and preferences of each member of the family. Ask your children what they like to read, and try to stock up on their favorite subjects and authors. A small collection of books, thoughtfully gathered over time, is better than a large collection that goes unread.

How should we display our collection?

In a way that invites the family to dig in! Sturdy bookcases, built-in shelves, and open magazine racks are excellent places to display and store reading material. An orange crate works well, too. A floor-to-ceiling wall system with glass doors might be beautiful to behold, but would discourage a young reader who couldn't get to the books inside. Be sure to put reading material for the youngest readers on the lowest shelves. You may want to group together books about your child's favorite topics—from dinosaurs to space travel—or books by a favorite author.

What kinds of reading materials should we include?

Just about anything goes in a family library. Paperback and hardcover books, a dictionary, an atlas, song books, magazines for parents and kids, newspapers, and even mail-order catalogs all have a place. Keep the ages and interests of family members in mind when selecting material, and get their suggestions. Make sure there is something for everyone at every reading level.

A Shelf of One's Own

Children may want a place separate from the family library to keep books that have special meaning or value for them. By encouraging children to set aside their personal favorites, you are helping them express their affection for books, and showing them that you respect their reading.

Here are some tips for helping your children set up their own collections:

- **Find a special place for your children's books.** If your children's room does not already have a bookshelf or bookcase, you can use a box, basket, or other sturdy container. Plastic stacking cubes work well and come in a variety of colors.
- **As often as possible, let your children choose the books they want to read and add to their collection.** A book-buying trip to a yard sale or bookstore can be a fun Saturday morning family activity.
- **Take your children to the library regularly.** Even a child with a well-stocked bookshelf needs a frequent, fresh supply of books.

Encourage your children to keep their library books alongside their own books and to treat them with the same care and affection. Children's librarians can be a big help in suggesting books for your library.

- **Give your children books or magazine subscriptions as gifts.** And encourage them to give books as gifts to other family members.
- **For babies and young toddlers, choose sturdy books that can survive rough handling.** Board books, for example, have thick pages that can be turned easily and wiped clean.

Display a few books with their covers facing out. An appealing cover might entice a youngster to pick up the book and take a peek inside.

Source: RIF Parent Guide Brochure

