

Parents can help kids learn to write

Karina Bland

The Arizona Republic
Dec. 17, 2006 12:00 AM

Read what your children have written, and you're doing more than helping them with their schoolwork, says Maryann DiRobbio, a literacy specialist at Creighton Elementary School. You're telling them that what they have to say is important.

Don't point out every misspelled word or grammatical error, DiRobbio warns. Putting pencil to paper is a courageous act: writing down ideas, thoughts and feelings where anyone can read them.

It matters only that they did it, not that they missed a "p" when spelling "puppy" or that they forgot to put a period at the end of every sentence. You can work on spelling and punctuation later.

For now, as children experiment with their first stabs at writing, they need encouragement and someone to read what they have written.

"Once they get to know that you will read it and you will listen, they don't stop writing," DiRobbio says.

The following are some ways in which parents can help their children be better writers:

- Get them started. If your children ask, "What should I write about?" ask them to tell you about something that they did recently, such as a trip to the park. Ask questions to get details and then ask them to write it down. They will write best about what they know.
- Provide them with a variety of books. What children read influences what they write, DiRobbio says. And they often model their writing after a favorite author.
- Even young children can "write" by drawing pictures and then tell a story to an adult who actually writes the words on each page. This activity provides what DiRobbio calls "language experience," getting familiar with the idea that spoken words also can be written and that words on paper mean something.
- Offer children blank journals, pens or even lined notebook paper stapled together with a construction-paper cover to give them a special place to record their stories.
- Encourage revision by providing highlighting pens, scissors, and glue or tape to your list of writing materials.

- After the holidays, have children write thank-you notes to let them practice functional writing, even if it's just a few heartfelt lines about how much they liked the gift.
- Children who are interested in art may like the idea of writing and illustrating their own comic books.
- Use a journal as a means of communication with your children as they reach the fourth and fifth grades, writing encouraging passages each day and then tucking it under their pillows, so they can write back.
- Find someone who will correspond regularly with your child. Writing is more meaningful if it is authentic.
- Play word games such as Scrabble and Boggle to increase your children's word choice and improve spelling.

Email this article
Print this article
Most emailed pages

Click to send
Choose File Print or Ctrl P or Apple P
Today | This Week