

## Building a Family Library

**Source:** RIF Parent Guide Brochure

**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.

**Family Projects** Setting up a home library is more fun if everyone in the family gets involved. Here are some activities you can do with your children to encourage their interest in collecting, displaying, and caring for family books—all inexpensive projects that won't require special tools or carpentry skills.

**Cinder block bookshelves.** You can buy cinder blocks or decorative bricks and particle-board shelves at your local hardware store. Set down two or three blocks and lay a shelf across them, making sure the structure is sturdy and childproof. Don't make the shelves higher than your child.

**Crate bookcases.** These are perfect for storing children's books that vary in size. Plastic crates are available in most department stores, or you can ask your local produce manager for a sturdy wooden one. If you like, give your child supplies to paint or decorate the crate.

**Desktop bookstand.** Find a small, sturdy rectangular cardboard box. Cut off and discard two of the long, *connecting sides*, but leave the short end panels intact. Set the box on a desk or table and stand a row of books inside. Kids can decorate the end panels which support the books on either side.

**Magazine storage box.** Some families save magazines so they can refer back to recipes or the directions for do-it-yourself projects. Kids may want to save magazines to cut up for art projects or schoolwork. You can make a simple storage file out of an empty clothes detergent box. On both sides of the box, cut on an angle from the top corner down to about two inches above

the *opposite* bottom corner. The box is ready to be decorated—with wrapping papers, stickers, cutouts...whatever. Fill the box with magazines and add it to your bookshelf.

**Beanbag bookends.** Cut two same-size square pieces of sturdy cloth, such as denim or corduroy. With right sides together, sew the pieces on three and a half sides. Turn inside out and fill with navy beans. Stitch the opening closed. Make a second one and use the pair as bookends for small, lightweight books such as paperbacks or board books. (If you don't like to sew, instead fill a pair of socks with beans, then knot the openings or tie them closed with a ribbon. Make sure the socks are securely tied.)

**Family card catalog.** Here's a project for the family that loves record-keeping. Set up a file box with index cards and dividers. Label the dividers according to the types of books your children like to read, such as mysteries, joke books, poetry, and historical fiction. Encourage your children to fill out a card for every book they read and enjoy, giving such information as title, author, where the book was obtained, and a few brief comments. They might want to give the book a rating of, say, two, three, or four stars.

**Homemade books.** Most children enjoy preserving their original stories, poems, and drawings in homemade books. They can write in blank books or notebooks, or they can assemble loose pages using binders, staples, or ribbons woven through margin holes. Homemade books go right on the shelf with other treasured books. They also make nice gifts for someone else's library.

**Family albums.** Some families might enjoy compiling notebooks of interesting magazine articles on travel, hobbies, or sports. The family photo album makes a great addition to your library, especially for younger children. Older children might enjoy writing captions for the photographs.

**Reading posters.** If you have space, you may want to keep art materials in your library area. Younger children especially will want to draw pictures inspired by their reading. Use their artwork to decorate the shelves and nearby walls.

**Bookplates.** Kids take pride in their books, and will enjoy identifying books as their own. On small, square pieces of paper, have them print a few words like, *This book belongs to Elizabeth* or *From the library of the Robbins Family*. After decorating their bookplates, your children can paste them to the inside front covers of their favorite books. If you want to label all the books in your family collection, design one bookplate and make photocopies.

**Bookmarks.** A good supply of colorful bookmarks arranged in a jar is an appealing reward to young readers who have to put down a book but plan to pick it up again and finish it. Be sure to save room for some homemade bookmarks, decorated by the kids with favorite characters, slogans, and stickers.

**Record a book.** A cassette recorder is one way to enable younger children to enjoy a favorite book again and again. Grandparents, parents, and older brothers and sisters can record stories for younger family members, or the entire family can join in as characters of a special book. This also makes a great gift! Store the cassettes along with the books on the family bookshelf.

**Where to Find Good Books** You can put together a large collection of books without putting out a lot of money. Here are some tips for collectors:

### **New Books:**

*Bookstores:* Many bookstores are especially good sources for inexpensive new books. More and more publishers are issuing paperback editions of books that originally came out in hardcover within a year of their publication, so look for these first. And some bookstores offer children's books at very affordable prices.

*Book clubs:* Many schools send home order forms for paperback book clubs that offer popular children's titles at very low prices. Advertisements for such book clubs appear in numerous magazines.

*Toy stores and toy catalogs:* These often have children's book sections; some of the larger chains have a wide variety and offer substantial discounts.

*Remaindered books:* Sold at a discount after early sales have dropped off, these books are available in many bookstores or through mail-order catalogs.

*School book fairs:* For many families, this is a good way to obtain inexpensive books, posters, and bookmarks, and benefit the school at the same time.

*Gifts:* Encourage friends and relatives to give books and magazine subscriptions rather than toys on gift-giving occasions. Be able to offer several suggestions for each child in your family. For example, you might suggest special interest magazines, titles of favorite library books, or new titles in a favorite series or by a favorite author.

### **Used Books:**

*Attics and basements:* Do you have any of your own books from childhood? Find them! Take delight in passing them down to your children and enjoying them again yourself.

*Library sales:* Many libraries have annual sales to make room for new titles. Check with your librarian for dates.

*Informal trading:* Encourage your children and their friends to swap books they have read for books they haven't. Or arrange a weekend book-swap among families from your children's school or neighborhood.

*Yard sales, flea markets, and church bazaars:* You can find some surprisingly good books for very little money at these events. Comb through neighborhood newspapers and newsletters for dates and locations. Some organizations even sponsor yearly used book sales, sometimes with thousands of titles.

*Secondhand bookstores:* These exist in most cities and can be readily found in the yellow pages. They can be a treasure trove of good, inexpensive children's books, and the selection is always changing.

*Thrift and resale shops:* Stores like these run by the Salvation Army, Goodwill, and service and veterans organizations are good sources for used books. Check them frequently for the best selection.