

Pointers For Parents

Read Aloud Time Is Crucial For Kids

(NAPSA)—Just as eating a good breakfast each morning helps children perform better in school, a daily dose of reading is a necessary jumpstart for their minds. Experts say, however, an alarming number of children don't read on a regular basis or even have the access to books they need to succeed.

According to the NAEP Reading Report Card, 37 percent of the nation's fourth graders don't read at the basic achievement level and over a quarter of them read for pleasure no more than twice a month. Recognizing this as a critical issue facing America's children, Cheerios, America's most popular cereal, has launched a significant commitment to childhood literacy. The program includes cereal box offers for critically acclaimed children's books, monetary support for national literacy initiatives and a variety of resources to help families make reading a priority.

To kick off the initiative, best-selling author Judy Blume, who has sold more than 75 million books worldwide, returned to her childhood school. After touring Fienberg-Fisher Elementary in Miami Beach, where she attended third and fourth grades, Blume read aloud from her book, *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*, and discussed the importance of childhood reading.

"It's absolutely critical that children discover the joys of reading early on and be given the opportunity to enjoy books every day," said Blume. "Read to your child early and often because good listeners become good readers."

In fact, Dr. Marilyn Adams (*Beginning to Read*) points out that a child with 15 minutes of read aloud time each day from six months to six years of age benefits from 500 hours of "reading" exposure, three times what a first grade teacher can provide with an hour of reading instruction each day.



At the launch of a national children's literacy initiative, best selling children's author Judy Blume talks to a fourth grade class about the importance of reading.

Daily read aloud time is critical for kids of all ages, but it's most effective when families alter their approach to make it enjoyable for different age groups. For instance, toddlers will benefit from hearing repetition and rhyming words, which stimulate the brain and help develop vocabulary. Three- to five-year-olds often love library story times and six- to nine-year-olds get a kick out of having their own library cards so they can check out books on a regular basis. Meanwhile, you can engage 10- to 12-year-olds by sharing favorite genres of this age group, including series books, mysteries and fantasies, humorous stories and cartoon anthologies. For more expert advice on raising readers at any age, go to www.Cheerios.com and click on the book logo. Additional information is available on millions of specially marked Cheerios boxes.

"I'm excited to champion this Cheerios initiative," Blume said. "It will create easy, affordable ways to distribute millions of books to children, and help educate families about the invaluable benefits of daily read aloud sessions."