

Building a bond through books

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Some of my favorite parenting memories are reading with my children. Whether I was holding them on my lap in a rocking chair, laying prostrate beside them on their bed, sitting leaned up against their bed, sitting in the hall way between their rooms voicing the characters of the Narnia or Harry Potter series, sitting together in the family room or using a flashlight in a tent on a mountain side - the location and posture didn't matter - what did matter was the bond we created by being together in an imaginary or real world of story. I believe that reading together has a magical way of drawing people closer, especially if those people are parent and child. I'm not sure why that is, but I think it has something to do with sharing our words and imaginations. Unlike visual stories, reading out loud requires a personal voice and expression, it also allows for more individuation of thought, imagination and sharing. I enjoy watching a good movie, television show or even a short You Tube clip now and again with my kids but none of these compare to my enjoyment of reading with them. A recent edition of the comic strip *Rhymes with Orange* drew this to my attention. The October 13, 2009 strip has a family seated together on a couch with popcorn and soda watching television. The caption reads, "The Barretts settled in for another great episode of 'Read to your Children.'"

Spending time reading together is the focus of **FRED (Fathers Reading Every Day)**. FRED is designed to encourage fathers, grandfathers and other positive male role models to sit down and read with their children on a daily basis. The four-week program was originally designed by Texas A&M University. Not only does FRED work to increase child literacy but it also enhances father-child involvement and provides a daily ritual of bonding and learning.

During the month of November on both our [English](#) and [Spanish](#) websites we are encouraging dads to participate in FRED with their children. Those fathers who fill out a reading log and take a simple pre and post survey will be entered into drawings for fun gifts to share with their kids. If you work in a school or head start where dads may not have access to the website feel free to download the materials and distribute hard copies far and wide!

Reading with your children helps them to develop literacy skills (follow this [link](#) for an essay by Suzanne Flannery Quinn on *Fathers and Literacy: Supporting your Child*) but it also helps to build your relationship. The vast majority of dads who participate in the FRED program report that the program improved their relationship with their child. A poll commissioned by the National Center for Fathering earlier this year revealed that 39 percent of fathers never read to their children. I hope you can count yourself with the 61 percent of dads who do read to their children, if not there is no better time to start than today!

