MISSISSIPPI CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

ROCKY'S READER

A *REACH OUT AND READ* NEWSLETTER







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Reach Out & Read®

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Children's of Mississippi

HEAR FROM A PROFESSIONAL

Summer Days, Steady Ways: Why Routines and Reading Matter for Your Child

Summer is a great time for your family to slow down and enjoy a break from the school-year hustle. But for young children, adding in a little structure goes a long way. Having a daily routine—wake up, play, eat, read, rest—helps children know what to expect, feel safe, and manage their emotions, which leads to better developmental outcomes.

You don't need a packed schedule; just a few consistent anchors throughout the day can make big difference.

One of the best things you can build into your summer routine is reading together. Research published in the Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics found that children who are read just one book a day hear approximately 290,000 more words by the time they enter kindergarten than children who aren't read to regularly—and children who are read five books a day hear over 1.4 million more words. Those extra words matter: richer vocabulary before kindergarten is one of the strongest predictors of reading success in school.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that parents read aloud to children beginning in infancy and the benefits go far beyond ABCs. When you snuggle up with a story, point at pictures, make silly voices together, and ask your child what they think will happen next, you are doing something even more important than building literacy skills. You are building your relationship. Shared reading creates moments of warmth, focused attention, and back-and-forth connection that nurture a child's sense of safety and being loved. Research consistently shows that these early relational experiences—feeling seen and valued by a trusted caregiver—are foundational to children's long-term social and emotional wellbeing.

By reading with your child, not only are you setting them up for reading success, but also helping them:

- **Strengthen their ability to focus**
- **Practice listening skills**
- **Learn to think critically**
- **Build a strong foundation for a lifetime of emotional wellbeing**

This summer, keep it simple: a regular bedtime, a morning routine, and one book a day. The routine is the gift—the story is just the beginning.



LETTER FROM DIRECTOR

Monique Ealey, ED. D.

As summer begins, families often look forward to longer days, new adventures, changing routines, and more time together.

One of the most powerful ways families can support children through these moments is by reading together. Sharing books creates comfort, strengthens trust, encourages communication, and provides children with a safe space to express emotions, ask questions, and connect with the people who care for them most. Even a few minutes of reading each day can help children feel grounded, confident, and emotionally secure.

This summer, we encourage families to make reading part of their everyday adventures. Visit your local library, create special story time moments at home, and come explore the hands-on and literacy-rich experiences the Mississippi Children's Museum has to offer.

> Let's make this a summer filled with stories, smiles, discovery, and connection, one book and one conversation at a time.

Monique Ealey, ED. D.
Director of Education
Mississippi Children's Museum

Some of my favorite books to read with young children include:

Little Blue Truck
by Alice Schertle

The Very Hungry Caterpillar
by Eric Carle

Curious George
by H. A. Rey

Madeline
by Ludwig Bemelmans

Good Night, Good Night, Construction Site
by Sherri Duskey Rinker & Tom Lichtenheld

Dragons Love Tacos
by Adam Rubin

Don't Push the Button!
by Bill Cotter



Children's of Mississippi
University of Mississippi Medical Center

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Children's of Mississippi



ROCKY'S BOOK CLUB

Every Tuesday at 10:00 a.m., as the museum settles into its morning rhythm, something special begins at Rocky's Book Club. Families gather—small feet shuffle forward, curious eyes widen, and caregivers follow close behind as, together, they step into a story waiting to unfold. Pages turn, voices rise and soften, and suddenly the room is alive with language. A laugh here. A gasp there. A child leans in, a parent leaning closer.

This is *Talk from the Start* in motion, where every word spoken becomes a seed, and every shared story strengthens the bond between child and caregiver. You can see it in the way little ones respond, in the way grown-ups echo, affirm, and connect.

And this moment doesn't stay here...

It travels into pediatric clinics like Dr. Vibha Vig's Sunshine Children's Clinic, and several others across our community. The same stories are opened, the same rhythms are shared, and the same seeds are planted in exam rooms and waiting spaces. Different walls, same promise: that language begins from the start, and it begins together.

The statewide travels of Rocky's House and its literacy initiatives are made possible through the generous support of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, whose investment in *Talk from the Start* helps bring meaningful early language experiences to children and families across Mississippi. ★

W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION®



HEAR FROM OUR CLINIC PARTNERS

"I first learned of Reach Out and Read in residency and saw its impact on my patients and even my own children. When I returned to my home community, establishing this model in clinic was among my first priorities. In addition to caring for patients' physical health and wellness and providing advice on safety, sharing this program of literacy with families is as invaluable and critical as nutrition and medicine.

A small investment of my time reading with a child and gifting them a book affords me valuable information about that child's development, home environment, and so much more. These books are creating a library for not only that child but also siblings, cousins, and neighbors who will benefit from having an age-appropriate tool to help them learn and grow.

Reach Out and Read is a tremendous asset for Mississippi, and I am grateful for MCM's role in it. As the state affiliate, MCM facilitates the program efficiently, offers support, and makes distributing books a smooth process for our office. It is my sincere hope that you will give the Mississippi Children's Museum every possible consideration."

"...sharing this program of literacy with families is as invaluable and critical as nutrition and medicine."

Henry Dodd, MD
Magnolia Pediatric Clinic



ON THE ROAD

"It was a pleasure having *Rocky's Book Club* here yesterday. Connecting with families and strengthening the *Reach Out and Read* mission in our waiting area was so rewarding and heartwarming! Our patients felt so much better after hugging Rocky and they walked away with smiles on their faces, forgetting all about their illness and pain.

Our mission as Pediatricians is to keep children healthy in their minds and bodies so that they can become successful adult citizens one day. Reading and experiencing a book with a loving and caring parent is an unmatched way of developing their brains and keeping them away from harmful screen time and allowing their creative imaginations to flourish.





The statue in front of our clinic which portrays young children reading together, is a good representation of what we stand for and MCM shares this passion with us whole heartedly.

We really appreciate the gift of books for our patients that we receive so regularly from the museum. The ritual of children running to the book rack after their wellness visit and grabbing a book of their choice has become a staple in our clinic. We look forward to Rocky's next visit soon!"

Vibha Vig, MD Pediatrics
Sunshine Children's Clinic

Rocky's Road Tour!

Rocky has been traveling all over Mississippi!

- Van Winkle Elementary School — *Hinds County*
- UMMC — *Jackson*
- Moore Community House — *Biloxi*
- Neshoba County
- MCM — *Meridian*
- Mississippi Book Festival — *Jackson*
- South Mississippi Regional Library — *Columbia*
- Waynesboro Public Library — *Waynesboro*
- Aurthur W. Wavtson Elementary School — *Port Gibson*
- Indianola Head Start — *Indianola*



PARENT TIPS: FEELINGS TOOLKIT

Books, conversations, and calming routines can become powerful tools for helping children navigate their feelings.

Summer is filled with exciting moments—vacations, camps, family gatherings, later bedtimes, and changing routines. While these experiences can create wonderful memories, they can also bring big emotions for children. Transitions, overstimulation, and breaks from familiar schedules may leave children feeling overwhelmed, frustrated, anxious, or emotional in ways they may not yet know how to express. This toolkit provides parents and caregivers with tips to help children navigate their emotions through practical activities and prompts that build a lasting foundation of healthy communication and emotional regulation.

Pause & Connect Before Correcting Behavior

When children are upset, they often need connection before correction. Take a moment to get down on their level, listen calmly, and acknowledge what they may be feeling before immediately responding to the behavior itself...

"I can see that you're frustrated."

"That was a big feeling."

"Let's work through this together."

Children feel safer and more understood when adults respond with calmness and empathy first.

Help Children Name Their Feelings

Young children are still learning the language of emotions. Helping them identify feelings builds emotional awareness and communication skills.

Try using phrases like...

"You seem disappointed."

"Are you feeling nervous or worried ?"

"It looks like you're really excited!"

Reading books together that explore emotions is also a wonderful way to help children recognize and talk about feelings in healthy ways.

Create a Calm Reading Corner

Designate a quiet, cozy space in your home where children can relax, read, and reset when emotions feel overwhelming. A calm reading corner can include...

* Favorite books
* Soft blankets or pillows
* Stuffed animals
* Quiet sensory items
* Dim lighting or calming music

This space can become a comforting place for children to slow down and regulate their emotions.



Use Books During Stressful Moments

Books can help children process experiences that may feel confusing or difficult. Reading together during stressful moments provides reassurance, comfort, and opportunities for conversation. Stories can help children...

* Understand emotions
* Build empathy
* Learn coping skills
* Feel less alone in their experiences

Even rereading a favorite story can provide a sense of stability and comfort during transitions.

Practice Breathing & Quiet Time

Simple calming routines can help children manage stress and big feelings. Try...

* Deep breathing exercises
* Quiet reading time
* Stretching or movement breaks
* Listening to calming music
* Sitting quietly together for a few minutes

Children learn emotional regulation best when adults model calm behaviors alongside them.

This summer, remember that every story shared, every conversation held, and every quiet moment of connection helps children feel seen, supported, and loved. Reading together not only strengthens literacy skills—it also strengthens emotional bonds that last far beyond the summer season.

Your Gift Makes an Impact!

Partner with us to bring the gift of literacy to a child in Mississippi!

All designated gifts to MCM's *Reach out and Read* initiative will support book funding and assist MCM in managing and expanding the program.

What can a single book do?

For a child, it can spark imagination, build confidence, and open the door to a lifetime of learning. Through our partnership with *Reach Out and Read*, families across Mississippi are not only receiving books, but they're also receiving the tools and encouragement to make reading part of everyday life.

Let's show what a gift can do together!

$25 places a brand-new book into a child's hands and sparks a love of reading.

$50 supports more children and families through our *Reach Out and Read* partnership.

$100 provides multiple books and meaningful shared reading moments.

$250 expands access to more children and families across our community.

$500 deepens our literacy outreach and family support efforts.

$1,000 helps ensure more children have access to books, encouragement, and lifelong learning opportunities.

Your support helps us ensure that every child within our network of clinics, regardless of zip code, has access to books and the opportunity to fall in love with reading.

Reach Out & Read

EMOTIONS AT PLAY

WITH PIXAR'S INSIDE OUT



This summer at the Mississippi Children's Museum,

families will have an opportunity to explore the Emotions at Play exhibit. They'll discover playful and meaningful ways to talk about feelings together. Inspired by Disney and Pixar's hit movie, *Inside Out*, this interactive experience encourages children and caregivers to recognize emotions, practice self-awareness, and build healthy communication skills.

Reading and talking together are powerful tools for emotional growth. When adults help children name and understand their emotions, children develop stronger coping skills, confidence, and empathy. Simple conversations during play can create lasting opportunities for trust and connection.

Whether you are at home, in the car, on vacation, during reading time, or even while exploring the exhibit together, we invite families to use the speech bubbles below as conversation starters. Simple prompts can open the door to meaningful discussions and help children build emotional vocabulary and confidence in expressing themselves. Invite children to pause, reflect, and share their feelings in a safe and supportive environment.

> We encourage you to write your own emotion prompts! Whether discussing joy, frustration, worry, excitement, or calmness, every conversation helps children better understand themselves and others.

This summer, we invite you to read, feel, grow, and play together, because every emotion has a story worth sharing.



What is something you are thankful for today?

When do you feel brave?

Who can you talk to when you feel upset?

Write down your own prompts!

MISSISSIPPI CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

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