

## Home Library Takeaways

Written by Jenni Person, BT Contributor  
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### The spineless household holds less promise



about a year ago, an article went flying around social media like wildfire among bibliophiles. It addressed the results of a study that declared that simply the presence of a home library during childhood increases lifelong achievement.

Those of us who are parents with bookcases taking up all our precious wall space, books stacked in every corner, and nightstands piled high and deep celebrated and shared the crap out of that article on our own feeds. We cheered, we sang, we danced (most of it virtually) as we bonded over our collections of thousands of books. We shared war stories of schlepping them cross-country -- and back again. We posted photos of our kids in front of book-lined walls. We swapped articles surveying beautiful and overstuffed libraries and bookstores all over the globe. We shared rickety book jitneys and library trailers built onto bicycles, couches and chairs built to hold books, and, of course, the cutest and cleverest of those Little Free Libraries.

Suddenly we were validated. We were no longer hoarders; we were good parents, providing our kids with an important foundation simply through furniture.

There were years that my kids resented the bookcases. One told me she was actually embarrassed by them. Her school friends -- more significantly, her camp friends in their suburban gated communities -- lived in homes with no books showing. That was, she thought, a sign of class, privilege, and having it all together. Our home, with every inch covered in titled spines, was bursting with unmatched items placed in seemingly random order, as books, piled both horizontally and vertically, filled the shelves.

And then friend after friend would come over and express wonder about how cool the house

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was (tiny size aside, apparently), and eventually she warmed up to her surroundings; the quirky bookishness passed for cool on an adolescent scale.

The home library findings of this study and the extolling of a home library are affirmed in the recent release by Pamela Paul and Maria Russo, *How to Raise a Reader*. In it, the book's authors, both of whom are editors at the *New York Times Book Review*

, write, "What a family library means is a collection of books shared among family members. Those books might be stuffed into a nook in the kitchen or piled on the floor of the living room or scattered throughout the house wherever there is empty shelf space. In fact, although it is lovely to have a special place for books, there's also an advantage to having books a little bit everywhere, woven into the very fabric of home life."

The book also refers to the study and others like it, noting that "Regardless of parents' income level or education, the statistic most highly correlated to literacy is the number of books present in the home."

The authors go on to lay out book suggestions and how to choose books to build a family library with the aim of instilling a lifelong love of reading. With helpful tips about how to select the right books for your own child and how to frame book discussions that turn reading into a joy, *How to Raise a Reader*

can be a useful parenting tool. And lucky for Miami, Pamela Paul is presenting the book at the always extraordinary Miami Book Fair on Saturday, November 23, at 4:00 p.m.

Presented on the same program and of equal interest to parents are also Dan Kois with *How to Be a Family: The Year I Dragged My Kids Around the World to Find a New Way to Be Together* ; and Adam Mansbach, author of the wildly popular No. 1 New York Times best seller *Go the F\*ck to Sleep* with his latest, *F\*ck, Now There's Two of You*

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Now, although studies link the presence of books in a home with literacy and, again, with lifelong achievement, it's vital to consider that not all parents have the money, time, space, or wherewithal to build a home library for their kids.

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So in an effort to assure that every kid has the opportunity to be surrounded by as many books as possible, please consider donating gently used (and not munched on) books as your kids outgrow them.

Read to Learn Books for Free is a program of the Children's Trust in partnership with Miami Book Fair at Miami Dade College. The program delivers approximately 4500 books per week to 65 free bookshelf locations through Miami-Dade County that are free for the taking by children and their caregivers. You can donate to this effort at the Read to Learn Books for Free tent at the Book Fair. It's also a great lesson for your kids, extending the learning from books even further.

*For more information on Read to Learn Books for Free, go to [www.miamibookfair.com/readtolearn](http://www.miamibookfair.com/readtolearn).*

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