There’s no better time than the present to emphasize the importance of reading at home. Solid readers perform better in school and in the workplace, have a healthy self-image, and become lifelong learners.

Research shows a whopping 45 percent of children ages 3 to 5 are not read to daily, and this lack of literature can take a negative toll on school performance. Luckily, there are many things parents can do to make kids passionate readers.

“Reading stimulates children’s imagination and expands their understanding of the world,” says actress Kate Beckinsale, who is teaming with “The Nestlé Share the Joy of Reading Program,” to raise awareness about the importance of children’s literacy and support the work of Reading Is Fundamental, the nation’s largest children’s literacy nonprofit.

If you’re looking to make reading a bigger part of your children’s lives, here are some great tips to get them motivated:

• Start young. Reading aloud to children at an early age is the most effective way to help them attain critical language and communication skills and instill great habits.

• Take advantage of free online tools and resources that help make reading an engaging, shared experience for parents and kids. For example RIF's "Leading to Reading" website contains activities for children ages birth to 5. Visit www.rif.org/kids/leadingtoreading for more information.

• Variety is the spice of life! Be sure your house contains plenty of books to choose from on a variety of topics.

• Launch a children's book club with other parents. Take turns hosting your children's friends for snacks and a lively discussion on the book of the month.

• Kids love getting mail! Subscribe to children's magazines so they'll have something fun and beneficial to look forward to each month.

• Make sure children have their very own library cards and become frequent patrons at your local library.

• Be it the morning paper or your favorite novel, set a great example by making reading a daily habit for yourself.

• Many literacy programs supporting underserved communities are currently experiencing federal funding cutbacks, but everyone deserves a chance to read. Invest in the lives of other children who might not have the same opportunities as your kids.

• Almost a quarter of public school fourth graders score below even the most basic levels on reading exams, according to National Assessment of Educational Progress. Don't let your children fall behind. Take steps to help your children and others to hone this basic tool for success.

—*StatePoint*