



HANDBOOK: VIP Program Information & Reading Tips



United Way
of East Central Iowa

WELCOME TO THE VIP TEAM

Thank you for sharing your time and talent to help a child become a successful reader by third grade. United Way of East Central Iowa (UWECI) ensures students participating in the Volunteers in Proficiency (VIP) program have a safe and positive environment conducive to learning.

The purpose of this handbook is to share information about the VIP program so you have tools and resources needed to have a positive volunteer experience. We hope this volunteer opportunity will be a positive and rewarding experience.

What You Need to Know

What is VIP?

Volunteers in Proficiency (VIP) is a literacy program which pairs volunteers and elementary school students to read together once a week during the school day. UWECI, local businesses, and community volunteers collaborate to provide one-on-one reading experiences for children who can benefit from the extra attention of a competent and caring adult. The goal is to increase children's success in school and foster a love of reading.

How Does VIP Work?

Each week, volunteers meet with two students to spend 20 minutes with each student reading and practicing literacy skills. School-based reading experts provide volunteer training and appropriate books for students. The VIP coordinator provides support to volunteers during their service.

Who Are the Students?

The students VIP volunteers serve are struggling readers who can face multiple barriers to achieving academic success. They can benefit greatly when they practice reading and literacy skills one on one.

Why is VIP Important?

Research shows reading proficiently by the end of third grade is a predictor of high school graduation and academic success. Students who participate in the VIP program benefit from consistent, positive interactions with caring adults who value reading. Volunteers benefit from the knowing they have a positive impact in a child's life and make meaningful connections within the community.

Role of the VIP Volunteers

VIP volunteers are a valuable resource for helping students in the community to become eager learners. As a VIP Volunteer, your primary goal is to provide guidance and support to your partners. You will have three distinct roles when working with students—all are equally important:

The Friend

First and foremost, you will be a friend: a caring, non-judgmental volunteer who is dedicated to helping the student to become a successful learner. Reading together will be the vehicle that nurtures the relationship. Remember to always serve as the students' greatest advocate and biggest fan.

The Learning Facilitator

Your second role will be learning facilitator. During your reading time, you will employ simple strategies to help your reading partner understand the reading process. You will identify and introduce resources to your reading partner to enhance personal development and individual growth.

The Mentor

The last role is mentor. Be present and attentive towards the students' ideas and concerns about school. When appropriate, offer advice, guidance, and information on being successful in school and the future. The mentoring relationship between the volunteer, the student, and the teacher generally grows during the school year.



Guidelines and Expectations of Volunteers

It is important VIP Volunteers have a positive experience that benefits both you and the student. We asked you to:

- Register with UWECL prior to volunteering
- Attend VIP orientation and training
- Complete a background check prior to volunteering
- Commit to a regular assignment of 40 minutes a day, one day a week for 12 weeks
- Arrive at assigned school a few minutes before the reading session begins
- Give a minimum 24-hour notice to the school if you are unable to attend due to illness or emergency
- Follow all school district policies and procedures (i.e., sign in at office)
- Maintain communication with the VIP Program coordinator regarding questions or concerns about the program
- Exhibit appropriate, role model behavior
- Assist your student to the best of your ability



VIP Volunteer Standards: The “Do’s and Don’ts”

To be the best VIP Volunteer, please:

- DO sign in and out upon arrival and departure at the school
- DO wear your volunteer ID badge on school grounds
- DO turn your cellphones and electronic devices off or on quiet mode
- DO exercise good personal hygiene
- DO remain in view of school staff at all time
- DO be reliable and maintain a regular schedule
- DO be flexible when working with your students
- DO volunteer with positivity that inspires students to be enthusiastic about reading
- DO accept each child for who they are
- DO have a sense of humor as well as patience and understanding
- DO respect confidentiality of academic or behavioral activity of every child
- DO bring student concerns to the attention of the teacher
- DO let the teacher be responsible for discipline and class supervision
- DO allow times of silence for students to think for themselves
- DO inspire students to do their best

And remember:

- DON'T assume a student celebrates the same holidays/ birthdays as you or other students
- DON'T assume the structure of a student's family (e.g., race, age, gender, etc.)
- DON'T assume reading ability by a student's age or appearance
- DON'T touch students in any way that is aggressive, disciplinary, or sexual in nature
- DON'T take photographs of students
- DON'T post student information on social media
- DON'T administer medication
- DON'T exchange gifts or food with students (your time is your gift)
- DON'T exchange contact information with students
- DON'T use time to only play games with students
- DON'T adopt the role of a student's teacher
- DON'T read FOR students, read WITH students

The next few pages include strategies, tips, and suggestions to help fulfill your roles as friend, learning facilitator, and mentor. These should enhance the effectiveness of the experience for both you and students! Remember, if you have any questions or would like recommendations, ask the teachers, site volunteer coordinators, or anyone on the VIP team. We are here to help!

Reading with a Friend

- **Find a Good Book**

One of the first steps is to find a book. In some cases, the teacher will choose the books for you. These choices are usually based on a student's reading ability and learning need. Many times, the books will reflect topics students are studying in class.

Pay attention to these topics! When a student can connect the time spent with you to time spent in class, more learning opportunities emerge.

At other times, you and your reading partners will be able to elect the books yourselves from either the school's library or from a selection of books determined by the teacher. A student may not choose books suited to his/her abilities and instead choose a book reflecting their immediate interests.

This is ok! This makes for a great opportunity for students to challenge themselves and for you to learn students' interests. In case the book is too difficult and frustrates the student, find a book with a similar/related topic and more suited to their ability. It's always good to have a spare!

Occasionally, your reading partners may select a book they have read before. That's ok, too! Rereading a familiar book can be great practice.

- **Find a Place to Read**

Once you select a book, find a spot where:

- You and your reading partner can read side by side
- The partner can see the pages of the book
- You and your partner can visit and read aloud without disrupting others

- **Talk with Your Student Partner**

One of VIP's main goals is to develop a relationship between students and caring, competent adults. So, get to know your reading partners!

Sometimes, the teacher will provide you some background about your student.

Other times, students will share personal information as you visit and read together.

Take time to let your student partners talk about their interests, favorite stories, pets, and so forth.

Find common interests you and your students can share—and they will want to share!

- **Read Together**

Reading a story together can take several different forms.

- Reading aloud provides an interactive learning experience with many benefits such as:
 - Promoting the joy of reading
 - Imparting knowledge
 - Building reading, communication, and social skills
 - Seeing a respected adult enjoy reading, which motivates students to want to read
- Reading in unison (or shared reading) is alternating the task of reading between you and your student partner. Reading in unison helps a young reader advance from being an active listener to becoming an independent reader.
- Independent reading, when students read on their own (and want to read on their own), is the ultimate goal of VIP. Depending on the selected books and their reading skills, your student partners may be able to take on all the oral reading. When reading partners take on the role of sole reader, it is your chance to take on the roles of a supportive coach and enthusiastic fan.

Reading as a Learning Facilitator

There are several strategies you can use to stimulate thinking and to keep the student actively involved. Here are some proven strategies for facilitating reading:

- **Preview the Book**

Before reading the book, take a moment to preview the book. Use the time to:

- Reinforce key ideas such as author and illustrator (“What does the author do? The illustrator?”)
- Identify the parts of a book (“Where is the book’s spine?”)
- Personalize the book’s subject (“Do you like this subject?” “Do you have a story to share?”)

- **Take a “Picture Walk” or “Teaser Trailer”**

When the book is new to the young reader, start with a brief “picture walk” through the pages. Have your reading partner try to describe what is happening in the pictures and predict the book’s story. These questions introduce reading comprehension and illustrate reading with a purpose.

- **Point to the Words (Tracking)**

This strategy is particularly advantageous for your reading partners in the early stages of learning to read. Have your reading partners point to the words as you read to help them realize each spoken word matches with a printed word.

- **Read with Expression**

Performance and presentation are essential to your reading partners enjoying the VIP experience. Read with expression and enthusiasm! Trying different noises, faces, and voices don't make you silly—they make you a fun reader!

- **Ask Questions**

- As you read, ask your reading partner questions such as:
 - “What do you suppose that means?”
 - “Do you think the story could have gone differently?”
 - “How do you think the characters are feeling?”

Asking these questions will help evaluate your reading partner's comprehension skills, allows students to predict what will happen in the book, and encourage them to ask their own questions.



Methods for Mentors

As your reading partners read, they will encounter unknown words and make errors. When that happens, here are several methods to help you fulfill your role as reading mentor.

- **Encountering New Words**

- **Take a beat, wait for a response:** When your reading partners hesitate, it might tempt you to help immediately and supply the challenging word. Instead, take a breath (or a couple of beats) and encourage applying the reading strategies they might know. Sometimes just a few seconds is all they need.
- **Point out consonants:** Use initial consonants and prompt students to look more closely at the printed word.
- **Look for “word chunks”:** When struggling with an unknown word, ask your reading partners if they know any parts of the word (“word chunks”). If they say yes, have them identify and sound out the “word chunk.” Then, help blend the other “chunks” to come up with the unknown word.
- **Supply the word:** If after giving your reading partners ample time to try on their own and they are still having difficulty with an unfamiliar word, don’t leave them hanging! It is important to give your partners the chances to try and make mistakes, but it is not good to have them struggle needlessly. Always strive to make your time together a positive experience.
- **Use repetition:** With some new words, your reading partner may need several tries to remember the pronunciation or definition. This is a good strategy for your reading partner to incorporate. Continue to reinforce their efforts and praise their successes.

- **Correcting Errors**

- **Point out errors:** You may wish to point out any errors your reading partners make as they read independently. Try letting them continue reading until the end of a sentence or page before pointing out the error. Stopping your partners mid-sentence can cause them to stumble and second guess their ability. Refrain from using negative words such as wrong or no. Simply point out the error and explain the error before you continue reading.

- **Encourage self-correction:** At times, you may have your reading partners try to discover the error by themselves by saying something like, “Something was not quite right in that sentence.” This a particularly useful method for those who continue to make similar mistakes. Once they discover the error, allow your reading partners to search for word and picture clues to fix the error on their own.
- **Give frequent praise:** Anytime your partners make an error but stops to correct it, praise them for their efforts.
- **Read for meaning:** Sometimes, your reading partner will say a non-word or substitute a word that is incorrect. If this happens without your partner noticing, talk about the sentence and what it needs to make sense.
- **Switch roles:** With some errors, you might find it helpful (and your partners might find it fun) to switch roles with your reading partners. Ask your reading partner to look at the words as you reread the sentence and then ask if what you read made sense. This fun practice helps your reading partners read for meaning.
- **Reread the sentence: EVERY TIME** you find an error and make a correction, have your reading partners reread the entire sentence. This helps improve their retention, vocabulary, and reading fluency.

Ending the Session

Ending the session positively is essential in creating an ongoing relationship with your reading partners. Try implementing these strategies before leaving your site for the week:

- Conclude your VIP session by asking your reading partners their own opinions about the session. Like:
 - “What did you think of the story?”
 - “What was your favorite part of the session?”
 - “Should we try to find more books like the one today?”
 - “What kind of books should we try next time?”
- Ask your reading partners to summarize what you read together or to retell the story in their own words.
- Tell the partners how much you appreciate their efforts and hard work.
- Assure your partners you had fun.
- Tell your partners you’re looking forward to the next session.

Sponsor



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Questions?
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