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Free informational handouts for educators, parents, and students

My Child Can Read – But Won’t! Motivating Children to Read for Pleasure

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Why doesn’t my child like to read?

There are probably many answers to this question, but the first order of business is to ask your child directly. After hearing his or her reason(s), you can begin working to help your child discover that reading can be, and is, a pleasure. Nagging, bribing, demanding, setting unrealistic time segments for reading, or criticizing their choice of reading material will not encourage reading for pleasure! Forcing children to read is like forcing them to eat a food they don’t like; they’ll hate it forever!

Historical Reasons Children Give for not Reading!

We have all used or heard these reasons before:

It’s boring. It isn’t any fun, and it’s hard.

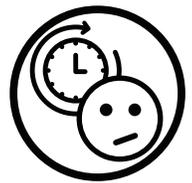
For children with any language difficulties, reading creates anxiety. Children may not know what anxiety means, but they know it makes them feel frustrated and uncomfortable. Research tells us that the more children read, the better readers they become, and the reverse is also true. Children struggling with reading usually have poor reading skills. Talk with your child’s teacher. If your child is not reading at the appropriate grade level, find *hi-lo* readers (books, magazines, or comics written below grade level, with high-interest, age-appropriate topics) in the library or bookstore: sports, hobbies, mysteries, riddles, jokes, etc. Ask the teacher for suggestions.



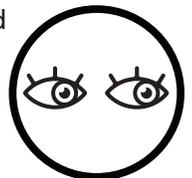
I don’t have to read at home; I read all day at school. After having to read what the teacher wants them to read “all day,” reading materials must appeal to their interests.



I don’t have time to sit and stare at a book. Who said it HAD to be a book? For older children, reading articles online is just as much reading as turning the pages of a book. Prompt your child during a normal conversation with a question or idea. “See if you can find out about the different products companies can make from recycling plastic bottles.” Children are very computer savvy these days. Ask him or her to search the internet (under your watchful eye!) and find the answer. This kind of research kills a lot of birds with one stone. Reading online requires a multitude of skills: searching, researching, scanning, selecting, and following other links in order to find answers. Searching for one answer usually prompts other questions and curiosities, leading the child to read even more about a subject or topic.



I have better things to do. Lead your child to use reading materials to do fun activities: building models, making paper airplanes, coin collecting, cooking and baking, etc. Following directions helps develop comprehension.





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(cont.)

Here are some other ways to encourage reading at home.



- Scout around for books, magazines, or comics you think your child might like to read. Present it as a gift. *"I know how much you like airplanes. I found this book about WWII bombers, and I thought you might like to look at it."* Don't mention the word "read"; "look at it" will produce the same result!



- Ask older children to read with their younger siblings. *"Would you read a story to Jon and let him read it back to you? He needs a good reader to listen to him."*



- Play games that are reading related: spelling games, trivia games, board games that require reading cards or board spaces, and card games with directions.



- Find models or other crafts that require reading directions for assembly. This is great for teaching sequencing, prediction, and following directions.



- Let your child see you reading, and then share your thoughts about your book or magazine. *"I was reading this article about Michael Jordan. Did you know that in school, he didn't make the basketball team three years in a row? I'll give you the magazine when I finish. It's a great article."*



- Set aside quiet times for reading. This could be a few minutes after dinner, after a bath and before bed, etc.



- Take advantage of reading and discussing road signs, menus, labels, or even lyrics to music.



- Limit TV to make time for reading, but never use TV or video games as a reward for reading or as a punishment for not reading.



- If your child is reading a book or magazine, allow an extra few minutes to finish a chapter or an article before bed.



- Extend reading experiences by visiting the museum or art gallery, attending sporting events, or seeing a movie based upon a book your child has read at school or at home.



- Have a family book club night! Everyone gathers and brings a book, magazine, comic, or newspaper and shares a passage, a bit of trivia, a human interest story, an interesting fact, or even a joke that they like. Inspire your child to read more by saying, *"That's very interesting! I'd like to hear more about that when you finish reading...I didn't know that; tell me more...Those are very funny jokes! Read some more."*



- Don't force your child to finish a book he or she doesn't like. There are millions of other choices.



- Read to and with your child. As you read, your child will pick up important literacy skills in the process: vocabulary, fluency, inflection (changes in pitch or tone of the voice), comprehension, and more. Ask questions as you read; *"What do you think will happen next? How do you think the story will end? What was your favorite part of the story? Which character is your favorite; why?"*

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