

Children Who Can Read, But Don't...

Parents are always asking how they can encourage reading. I found the following information on the RIF website:

Studies show what common sense tells us: the more kids read, the better they read and the more pleasure they get out of reading. Unfortunately, the reverse holds true: children who read very little usually have poor reading skills. Reading is a struggle for them, and they avoid it whenever possible. *Is there anything that you can do to encourage your children to read?* First, it's helpful to know your child's reasons for not liking or wanting to read. These reasons can help you decide what will work best in motivating your child to discover or rediscover how much fun reading can be.

Why Some Kids Don't Like to Read

Do any of these statements have a familiar ring? They are the reasons children frequently give for not reading:

- **It's boring.** Don't despair if your children have this response to reading that is assigned at school. You can expose them to another kind of reading at home reading that is related to their interests.
- **I don't have the time.** Kids *are* busy. School, friends, sports, homework, television, and chores all compete for their time. Some children need your help in rearranging their schedules to make time for reading.
- **It's too hard.** For some children, reading is a slow, difficult process. If your child is having a hard time reading, talk with their or her reading teacher. Ask about how you can find interesting books and materials written at a level that matches your child's reading ability.
- **It's not important.** Often children don't appreciate how reading can be purposeful, or relevant to their lives. Parents can take it upon themselves to find reading materials on subjects that *do* matter to their kids.
- **It's no fun.** For some children, especially those who have difficulty reading, books cause anxiety. Even for children with strong reading skills, pressure from schools and home that emphasize reading for performance can make reading seem like a chore. Our advice: take the pressure off reading so that your children can enjoy it.

If you or someone else in your family has had problems reading, there is a greater likelihood your children will experience these difficulties, too. Speak to a reading teacher if you have reason to suspect a learning problem. Early testing administered at your child's school can identify a learning disability and alert the school to your child's need for special teaching.

What Won't Work

Parents have told us that the following tactics only strengthen a child's resistance to reading:

- **Nagging.** Avoid lecturing about the value of reading, and hounding a child who is not reading. Your child will only resent it.
- **Bribing.** While there's nothing wrong with rewarding your child's reading efforts, you don't want your youngster to expect a prize after finishing every book. Whenever possible, offer another book or magazine (your child's choice) along with words of praise. You can give other meaningful

rewards on occasion, but offer them less and less frequently. In time, your child will experience reading as its own reward.

- **Judging your child's performance.** Separate school performance from reading for pleasure. Helping your child enjoy reading is a worthwhile goal in itself.
- **Criticizing your child's choices.** Reading almost anything is better than reading nothing. Although you may feel your child is choosing books that are too easy or that treat subjects too lightly, hide your disappointment. Reading at any level is valuable practice, and successful reading helps build confidence as well as reading skills. If your differences are simply a matter of personal taste, respect your child's right to his or her own preferences.
- **Setting unrealistic goals.** Look for small signs of progress rather than dramatic changes in your child's reading habits. Don't expect a reluctant reader to finish a book overnight. Maybe over the next week with your gentle encouragement. *I suggest reading with your child, taking turns, but don't let it turn into a power struggle.*
- **Making a big deal about reading.** Don't turn reading into a campaign. Under pressure, children may read only to please their parents rather than themselves, or they may turn around and refuse to read altogether. Reading is part of homework every night. It is hard to get a kid that hates to read to read for 30 minutes. *I've found that if you keep it light and fun, and if the book is humorous or interesting, it really helps. It is worth putting time into selecting a book that is not too hard or too easy and that it is about some topic your kids loves. the Hank Zipzer series is great,*

20 Ways to Encourage Reading

We've told you why some kids don't like to read, and what other parents believe will not succeed in changing their minds. Now for some ways to turn a young reader's reluctance into enthusiasm:

1. Scout for things your children might like to read. Use their interests and hobbies as starting points.
2. Leave all sorts of reading materials including books, magazines, and colorful catalogs in conspicuous places around your home.
3. Notice what attracts your children's attention, even if they only look at the pictures. Then build on that interest; read a short selection aloud, or simply bring home more information on the same subject.
4. Let your children see you reading for pleasure in your spare time.
5. Take your children to the library regularly. Explore the children's section together. Ask a librarian to suggest books and magazines your children might enjoy.
6. Present reading as an activity with a purpose; a way to gather useful information for, say, making paper airplanes, identifying a doll or stamp in your child's collection, or planning a family trip.
7. Encourage older children to read to their younger brothers and sisters. Older children enjoy showing off their skills to an admiring audience.
8. Play games that are reading-related. Check your closet for spelling games played with letter tiles or dice, or board games that require players to read spaces, cards, and directions.

9. Perhaps over dinner, while you're running errands, or in another informal setting, share your reactions to things you read, and encourage your children to do likewise.
10. Set aside a regular time for reading in your family, independent of schoolwork, the 20 minutes before lights out, just after dinner, or whatever fits into your household schedule. As little as 10 minutes of free reading a day can help improve your child's skills and habits.
11. Read aloud to your child, especially a child who is discouraged by his or her own poor reading skills. The pleasure of listening to you read, rather than struggling alone, may restore your child's initial enthusiasm for books and reading.
12. Encourage your child to read aloud to you an exciting passage in a book, an interesting tidbit in the newspaper, or a joke in a joke book. When children read aloud, don't feel they have to get every word right. Even good readers skip or mispronounce words now and then.
13. On gift-giving occasions, give books and magazines based on your child's current interests.
14. Set aside a special place for children to keep their own books.
15. Introduce the bookmark. Remind your youngster that you don't have to finish a book in one sitting; you can stop after a few pages, or a chapter, and pick up where you left off at another time. Don't try to persuade your child to finish a book he or she doesn't like. Recommend putting the book aside and trying another.
16. Treat your children to an evening of laughter and entertainment featuring books! Many children (parents, too) regard reading as a serious activity. A joke book, a story told in riddles, or a funny passage read aloud can reveal another side of reading.
17. Extend your child's positive reading experiences. For example, if your youngster enjoyed a book about dinosaurs, follow up with a visit to a natural history museum.
18. Offer other special incentives to encourage your child's reading. Allow your youngster to stay up an extra 15 minutes to finish a chapter; promise to take your child to see a movie after he or she has finished the book on which it was based; relieve your child of a regular chore to free up time for reading.
19. Limit your children's TV viewing in an effort to make time for other activities, such as reading. But never use TV as a reward for reading, or a punishment for not reading.
20. Not all reading takes place between the covers of a book. What about menus, road signs, food labels, and sheet music? Take advantage of countless spur-of-the-moment opportunities for reading during the course of your family's busy day.