

SKILL BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES

Making Reading Interesting

Question: My six-year-old hates reading. How can I make it more interesting for him?

Every child has different interests. When we watch and learn about their interests then we can build on them by promoting the life skill of Communicating.

Communicating is much more than understanding language, speaking, reading and writing—it is the skill of determining what one wants to communicate and realizing how our communications will be understood by others. It is the skill that teachers and employers feel is most lacking today.

1

Find out why your child isn't interested.

If you can, try to figure out why your child hates reading. Is reading too difficult, too pressured, or too quiet when your child prefers being active? You can:

- Have a non-judgmental conversation with your child. Can he tell you what he doesn't like about reading? Knowing what's wrong is a good place to start in trying to turn this around. Can he tell you anything he does like about reading? That gives you something to build on, to do more of.
- You may want to speak with your child's teacher to see if your child needs any extra help with reading skills. However, there is much you can do at home to help your child.

Many children have what Judy DeLoache of the University of Virginia and her colleagues call "extremely intense interests"—which they define as a long-lasting passionate interest in a category of objects or activities. Your child's interests are the launching pads for helping your son enjoy reading.

2

Let your child select books and/or magazines that extend his interests.

Your child is more likely to spend time reading if the material reflects things that are important and meaningful to him.

- If your child is interested in sports, for example, guide him to choose stories that relate to sports. You can even teach him how to read and understand the statistics reported in the sports section of the newspaper.
- Whatever your child's interest, choose a variety of fiction and nonfiction books. You can also use toys, dolls and figurines that reflect this interest in pretend play.

3

Make reading a family tradition and share stories.

According to Catherine Snow of Harvard University, a renowned expert on language development, "Research shows that families in which children are read to regularly are families whose children are more likely to arrive at school ready to learn, with bigger vocabularies and a greater capacity to participate effectively in classrooms."

You can read stories aloud as a family; these times will become treasured memories. Bedtime reading with a parent does not have to end when your child is capable of reading on his or her own.

- Be a role model. As your child grows, he is watching and learning from you. Show your child that reading is important to you. Share what you are reading with your child and have conversations about each other's books or magazines.
- The best conversations and interactions involve what researchers call "Take Turns Talk"—you or your child does something and the other responds, back and forth taking turns.
- When reading with your child, watch and listen to your child's response to the words and pictures. Build on what your child says and extend it with open-ended questions and comments. Children learn Communicating by asking and responding to questions.

4

Use reading in your everyday life and see if your child can begin to identify sounds, letters and words.

When out and about with your son, bring identifying letters, words, and sounds into your everyday conversations. You can say:

- "I see something that begins with the same letter (or sound) as your name. What do you think it is?"
- "I see something that sounds like (or rhymes with) fall. Do you know what it is? It's a ball!"
- "What do you think that sign is telling us to do? It says, 'Stop,' so we'd better stop up ahead."
- "Can you help me find the kind of spaghetti we want on the shelf? I cut out the label from the last box and it looks like this."

You can apply these same strategies to books you are looking at together, asking your child to find a letter or a word on a page that is familiar.

5

Help your child make personal books.

You can use photos from one of your son's special experiences and write about them together. Your child can also illustrate his own story. This activity promotes the life skill of Communicating by helping your child think about the story he wants to tell.