

# Tips for Encouraging Kids to Read

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We asked the parents and teachers who frequent our web site for their ideas about how to encourage kids, especially those who aren't excited about books, to do more reading. Thanks to all you tipsters out there, we received tons of advice, which we've summarized in the seven tips below. From Reading Rockets.

## 1. "Read me a story!"

Nearly every suggestion sent in by our tip-sters had this message at its core. Whether snuggled under the covers with peanut-butter sandwiches, or following along with a book on tape while on a road trip, reading together is a powerful tool in motivating your child to read.

## 2. Beyond books

Our tipsters were quick to point out that reading material comes in many different shapes and sizes, some of which may be more accessible to a new reader. Video games, magazines, and comic books all provide opportunities for reading practice. Other suggestions for sneaking under a wary child's reading radar

include playing board games that involve written instructions, corresponding with a pen pal, and turning on the closed captioning on your television. To illustrate the practical side of reading, have your child help you with the grocery list, or leave reminder notes for your child to discover throughout the day.

### 3. Keep it fun, for everyone

Another message that came through loud and clear was that if kids are going to enjoy reading, the experience has to be enjoyable. As you read with your children, keep them involved by asking questions about the story, and let them fill in the blanks. You can also create activities related to the stories you're reading. In one household, reading *Little House on the Prairie* prompted lively games of "wagon-train" and discussions about life on the frontier. Another family likes to create mini-plays, acting out the stories they read. While her grandson "helps" in the garden, one grandmother spells words for him to write out using a muddy stick. Once the word is complete, the two of them sound it out together, wipe the word away, then move onto the next. This reading game keeps her grandson occupied for hours.

### 4. "Look at what I did!"

Another successful approach to motivating your child is to use some sort of visible record of achievement. A chart or graph that marks the number of books a child has read gives him or her a sense of accomplishment. To spice it up a bit, choose a theme that goes along with your child's interests. One example would be a Reading Olympics, where the child goes for the gold by reading a certain number of books.

A similar method can be used to help expose your child to the wide variety of genres available for exploration. Create a Bingo card or Passport where each space can be filled in by reading a mystery book, or a piece of non-fiction, to give a few examples. Once the goal has been reached, reward your child with something to celebrate his or her special achievement. It doesn't have to be anything elaborate – one-on-one time with a parent or teacher, or an ice cream cone are suggestions from our tipsters – just something that lets your child know how proud you are of his or her accomplishment.

## 5. "I want that one!"

Reading should be a choice, not a chore. Make sure there are a variety of books, magazines, and other materials available for your child to choose from, wherever your child may be. Let your child's interests guide his or her reading choices. While it's fine to make suggestions, don't force your conceptions of what your child should be reading onto your child. And, keep an eye on the reading level of the books your children choose. Let them stretch to the best of their ability, but be ready to help if they get discouraged.

## 6. Something to talk about

Reading doesn't have to stop when you put the book down. Talk to your child about books you've read and books you think he or she might enjoy. Point out similarities between everyday events and stories you have recently read. If your child has a favorite author, help your child write him or her a letter. For a more structured discussion, consider joining, or starting, a parent/child book club.

## 7. Hey, kids! What time is it?

Regardless of how motivated your child is, he or she will not read if there isn't any time to do so. Carve time out of the busy day and dedicate it to reading, both together and on your own. By setting aside specific times, rather than trying to squeeze it in between soccer and dance lessons, you send the message that reading is an important activity, and something your child will enjoy.

*Jessica Snyder (2002)*