

# Skill-Building Opportunities

## Making Reading Interesting

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

You were the bookworm who always had your head in a book and now you're panicked that your child hates reading? Don't worry. Every child has different interests. By watching and learning about their interests, 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 you want to communicate and realizing how 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 learn why your child hates reading. Is reading too difficult, too pressured or too quiet when your child prefers being active?

- 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 turning this around. Can he tell you anything he likes about reading? This knowledge will provide something to build on, to reinforce.
- You may want to speak with your child's teacher to see if your child needs 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 celebrate 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 understand the statistics reported in the newspaper's sports section.
- Whatever your child's interest, choose a variety of fiction and nonfiction books.

You can also use toys, maps, costumes, dolls and figurines that reflect this interest in pretend play.

**3**

### Make reading a family tradition and share stories.

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 child, introduce 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 daughter's special experiences and write about them together. Your child can also illustrate her own story. This activity promotes the life skill of Communicating by helping your child think about the story she wants to tell.