



Motivate the reluctant reader

For parents of primary and junior school students

What is a reluctant reader?

There is no universally accepted definition of the term *reluctant reader*. Children who are or become reluctant readers can do so for a variety of reasons. Their reluctance *may* occur because of limited prior learning experiences, low self-esteem, stumbling blocks to their growth as readers and a host of other reasons.

Broadly speaking, reluctant readers often fall into three categories:

1. *Dormant*: they like to read but often don't have time or don't make time for reading.
2. *Uncommitted*: they do not like to read but may read in the future.
3. *Unmotivated*: they do not like to read and do not ever expect to like to read.

How do parents turn reluctance into motivation?

- Celebrate and be proud of your children's successes in reading.
- Continue to read to your children every day, regardless of their age, and let them choose what to read.
- Encourage your children to read and write letters, postcards, e-mails, lists, and messages.
Leave notes and riddles around the house for them to find.
- Read some of the books and other materials that your children enjoy so that you can share reactions and pleasures together.
- Browse together in bookstores, and through library collections or magazine racks.

What types of reading material can we show we value to encourage them to read more?

We need to widen our definition of both literacy and what it means to read. We can expose our children to a variety of reading materials and opportunities outside of books. Other types of reading materials could include:

- instructions, labels, recipes, ingredient lists on packages
- billboards, advertisements and commercials
- newspapers, magazines
- posters, greeting cards and signs
- street maps, timetables and schedules
- brochures and pamphlets
- instructional manuals and rules for games
- DVD liners (movies) and CD liners (music)
- song lyrics
- websites and online content
- charts, tables, diagrams, figures

What kinds of books can arouse curiosity to read?

Every child has his or her own personal tastes and interests. Parents can help reluctant readers by tapping into these interests and providing them with opportunities and materials to pursue their interests and make their own choices. Books fall into two common categories:

Fiction – mystery, science fiction, fantasy, romance, adventure, war, historical, poetry, graphic novels, comic books, joke books, etc.

Non-fiction – atlases, information books, dictionaries, encyclopedias, craft books, cookbooks, instruction manuals, games books, and (auto)biographies, etc.

What are some practical and effective strategies parents can use in their homes to encourage reluctant readers?

Reading aloud helps children, especially those who are discouraged by their poor reading skills, become more confident. The pleasure of listening to you read may help them rediscover the joy of reading. Remember these points:

- Read aloud often to, and with, your child regardless of her age.
- Make reading a fun, enjoyable experience.
- Read in your first language if English is your second language.
- Encourage older children or other relatives to read to younger children.
- When you read to your child, read with enthusiasm.
- Let your child select the reading material and support his choices.
- Use visual clues found in the reading material to help them make meaning.
- Show interest in, and talk to your child about, what you are reading together.
- Connect what you are reading to your child's experiences and interests.
- Present reading as an activity that has a real-world purpose and application, like putting together a model or a toy.

Shared/guided reading and shared discussion

Both support children in their journey towards becoming stronger and more independent readers. In shared/guided reading and discussion, parents talk about the reading material, model how to read, and encourage children to join in whenever they can.

Keep in mind the following points:

- Praise your child whenever possible.

- Enjoy the experience of reading together; show interest in what you are reading and talking about together.
- Point to each word, as you say it, to help your child to learn the words.
- Listen carefully to how they read and to what they say.
- If your child makes mistakes, try not to emphasize the errors. Instead, use complete sentences so that your child hears a model of the correct word and good grammar.
- Talk about pictures, artwork and/or other interesting details that accompany the text.
- Ask interesting questions about the text. Encourage and model curiosity.
- Review new and/or difficult words.
- Encourage your child to talk about the material and to make connections both to other things she has read and to her own life.

This tip sheet was prepared by Wendy Bowker, early literacy teacher, and Ian Pettigrew, instructional coordinator.