

Turn Your Reluctant Reader into an Avid Reader

Does your reluctant reader avoid reading at all costs? Maybe they find it too boring, too hard, too stressful or they just don't have time for it. Don't despair. There are things you can do to make reading more relevant, achievable and enjoyable so that your child will go out of their way to make time for it.

The thing with reading is that the more your child reads, the better they read. The better they get at reading, the more they enjoy reading and so the more they want to read. And so it goes on.

The trouble is, however, that the reverse is also true. If your child struggles at reading, they will avoid it. The less they read, the further they fall behind in reading and so the more they dislike reading.

The trick is to find a way to put your reluctant reader on the upward spiral - get them excited about reading and it follows that their reading skills will begin to take off.

After quite a struggle to get my child to start reading independently, he recently came back from school, settled down on the sofa and started to read a book. I never thought I'd see the day when that would happen! It was all about finding out how to make reading appeal to him (in his case a series of Pokemon comic books did the trick).

Below are some ideas to try and help you make that reading connection for your child so that you can turn your reluctant reader into an avid reader.

1. Choose Reading Material Carefully



Hone in on your child's interests

If your reluctant reader is interested in a particular topic they will be more motivated to read about it and will be more likely to understand what they are reading. This is because reading about a subject we already know something about is less laborious than reading about something we know nothing about.

We can use our background knowledge of the subject to predict some of the words we come across, so we no longer need to read every word individually. We can therefore read more fluently and so the meaning of what we are reading becomes clearer. Reading suddenly becomes a whole lot easier and more enjoyable.

So by choosing books and reading material which match your child's interests and hobbies, you will help to build their confidence and proficiency in reading.

- Pick genres that appeal to your reluctant reader. Boys tend to prefer humour, science fiction, action, fantasy and scary stories.
- Pick subjects that you know your child would be interested in, for example, the latest craze at school, hobbies, sports, cars, animals. If your child can get excited about the subject, they might start to become excited about reading about it.
- Try both fiction and non-fiction books. Perhaps your child has a preference for one or the other. Boys often read less fiction than girls. You can find some great ideas here of [non-fiction picture books](#) which might be just the thing to capture your child's imagination. If selecting fiction for a reluctant reader choose a book with realistic characters, readable and convincing text, and a subject which interest your child.

- Try books which relate to their favourite television series or a recent film they have watched.
- Choose books with appealing covers. For example, boys might be attracted to covers with bold colours, battle scenes or funny pictures.

Learn more about how to [choose the best books for reluctant readers](#) here.



Not just about books

Reading is not necessarily all about books. Other types of reading material might be just the thing to motivate your reluctant reader to read more and can be just as worthwhile. Try some of the following alternative forms of reading matter:

- [Comics or graphic novels](#). These can be a great way of hooking reluctant boys to reading. It worked for my son!
- Magazines on subjects which interest your child such as cars, sports (e.g. Sports Illustrated for Kids) or horses.
- Newspapers. You can read more about the benefits of encouraging your child to [read newspapers](#) here.
- Joke books, sports almanacs, biographies of favourite figures, Guinness Book of World Records.
- Websites and online articles.
- Collectable cards such as sports cards or Pokemon cards.
- Informational texts such as computer manuals or instructions.

Let your child choose

If your child has the freedom to choose what they want to read, they will be more enthusiastic to read it than if you force your choices on them.

- The best place for your reluctant reader to choose books to read is at the library. If you don't have easy access to a library, or you are looking to buy books, sit with your child while they browse an on-line book store.
- Don't judge what they choose, as long as it is age appropriate.
- If your child consistently chooses books above their reading level, pick out five to ten books at the right level and suggest they choose one of these.
- If they don't like what they've chosen, don't try to persuade your child to finish it. Recommend putting the book aside and trying another.

Choose at the right level

Help your child to choose reading matter at an appropriate level.

- Start with shorter books with simple sentences and straightforward vocabulary but which still have interesting characters and compelling plots. These are often referred to as "high interest, low vocabulary" books.
- Illustrations help your reluctant reader to understand the text and also pad out the text so that the book appears longer but can still be read relatively quickly.
- A useful test to see if a book is of an appropriate level for your child and won't frustrate them is summarised in [How to Get Your Child to Love Reading](#) by Esmé Raji Codell. Ask your child to choose a page in the middle of the book with a lot of text and read the page silently, counting on their fingers the number of words they come across which they don't know and cannot guess. If they find 3 to 5 words on the page the book will be a challenge. They can read it if they are motivated. 0 to 2 words would be a pleasure read. If they count more than five words the book is probably too hard for them.

Read book series

A great way to encourage a reluctant reader to read more is to hook them on a book series.

- If your child is enjoying a series of books, they often can't wait to read the next book. They are therefore motivated to read more frequently and for longer.
- After reading the first book in the series, your child has already got to know the characters and setting so they have a headstart with the subsequent books and are likely to get engrossed in them quicker.
- Many boys like to collect things and so can be attracted by the idea of collecting a series of books.

Find some examples of great [book series](#) for reluctant readers here.

2. Make Connections While Reading



Make reading relevant

Your child may be more motivated to read if they can see tangible benefits to reading. Try to make what they read seem more relevant to them. Show how reading can be a way of gathering useful information.

- Make books come to life by going on a family trip which links to a book your reluctant reader has read, e.g. visit an aquarium after your child has enjoyed a book on undersea creatures, or a natural history museum after reading about dinosaurs.
- Supply your child with props which complement what they are reading eg a magnifying glass and torch if reading a detective story.
- After reading a book, or a chapter of a book, which your child has particularly enjoyed, try acting it out together.
- Encourage activities that require reading, e.g. cooking (reading a recipe), playing a new game or making a craft (reading instructions), identifying birds or trees (reading a reference book) , planning a trip (reading a travel book).
- If your child asks you a question which you don't know the answer to, look up the information together on the internet or in a reference book and encourage them to read the answer to you.

Discuss what your child has read

Talk to your reluctant reader about the books they have read and use these discussions to point out connections with real-life experiences and also to show how books can lead to interesting exchanges of opinions as different people may think differently about the same book. These types of discussions also help make what your child reads seem relevant to them.

- If a book they have just read has been made into a film, watch the film and then talk about the differences between the book and the film.
- Share your reactions to something you have just read and then encourage them to do the same.
- Silently read the same book as your child at the same time, so that you can discuss it together.
- If your child is initially reluctant to share what they think about a book, encourage them to read reviews in an on-line children's book forum. Maybe they can even be encouraged to contribute their own review, for example on the Scholastic site pages [Share What You're Reading](#). They can also take quizzes on books that they've read at [Book Adventure](#).

Read aloud

Reading a book aloud helps to bring the book to life and so will help your reluctant reader to connect better with the book. Read aloud to your child,

read along with your child and also encourage your child to read aloud to you and anyone or anything that will listen.

- Take turns reading aloud with your child, alternating every section, page or chapter. I have found this helps my child's reading enormously. When he is listening to me reading he can concentrate wholly on comprehension and so when it is his turn to read he is able to read more accurately and more fluently because he understands better what is going on. He can really enjoy the story whereas if he was reading it all on his own he would be struggling to get through it.
 - Even though you may want your child to read more independently, do keep reading aloud to them too. By reading aloud to your reluctant reader you help to remind them of how exciting books can be, at a point when they may be getting bogged down in the mechanics of reading on their own. Read books aloud which are of a higher reading level than those which your child can read themselves. Under the age of 13 or 14 years old children listen on a higher level than they can read. So when you read aloud to children below this age you can read stories with a level of complexity and interest which they would not be able to read on their own. This helps to expand their vocabulary and expose them to different styles of literature. It also provides a great 'advertisement' for books, showing children what interesting books will be available for them to read themselves when they become good readers.
 - Buy or rent [audio books](#) for your child to listen to in the car or in the house. Professional actors do a fantastic job of really bringing these books to life.
 - Encourage your struggling reader to read aloud to toys, animals or younger siblings. When our children read aloud to us, we are always tempted to pick up their errors, which can be demoralising for our young readers. A dog or a cuddle toy, however, are non-judgmental and don't correct their mistakes. It is a great way for our children to gain confidence in their ability to read aloud.
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3. Create Reading Opportunities



Create time to read

Encourage your reluctant reader to always have a book on the go and to read a bit every day, ideally for about half an hour. Studies indicate that reading books for just half an hour a day could be worth up to 12 months' extra schooling by the age of 15. Try to create as many opportunities as possible for your child to read, for example:

- Take books along on long journeys or when waiting for appointments.
- Cut out interesting articles from newspapers or magazines for your child to read.
- Leave all sorts of reading materials such as books, magazines, and catalogues in prominent places around your home.
- Set aside half an hour a day during vacations or weekends when the whole family reads. This is also important because you are setting a

good example by reading yourself. Good male reading role models are also particularly important for boys.

- My son reads before going to bed, so I often sit on his bed and read my own book at the same time. We don't lose this special time together even though he is reading independently and I am on hand to explain what any words mean which he doesn't understand.



Incentivise

Keep a [reading log](#) of the books your reluctant reader has read and reward them after they have read a certain number of books, e.g. ten books.

- Display the chart prominently in your child's bedroom so that they are reminded to read.
- Agree the reward with your child early on so they know what they are working towards.
- Encourage them to rate each book they have read, giving it from 1 to 5 stars.
- While your child is filling in the reading log, and particularly while they are rating the book, take the opportunity to start a discussion about the book, asking them about what they liked and didn't like about it.

Source; Childrensbooksandreading.com