

10 Ways to Encourage Your Reluctant Reader

Reading can become an even bigger battle as your child enters middle school or high school, especially for kids with learning and attention issues. Your child may need more encouragement than ever. Use these strategies to motivate him or her to read more.

1. Let your child choose. The books your child is drawn to might not be your favorites, but don't criticize her choices. Reading is reading. Show your child that you respect her judgment and accept her preferences. If she's reluctant to read, allowing her some control over what she reads can go a long way toward increasing her motivation.

2. Help your child find reading she'll like. What is your child interested in? Skylanders? *Frozen*? Boy bands? Whatever it is, connect it to reading. Find books, magazines or articles on her favorite topics. And look for different formats that may be more accessible to kids with learning and attention issues, such as graphic novels or eBooks with audio support. It's also a good idea to find material that is the right reading level for her. If it's too hard, she might get discouraged.

3. Model reading. The more your child sees you reading, the more likely she'll be to follow suit. In middle school, she may resist doing what you *tell* her to do. But she's still likely to imitate what she *sees* you do. If you've struggled with reading, it may be helpful to talk to your child about your experiences and the strategies you've used to overcome these challenges.

4. Read together. Set aside a designated time when your whole family can read. Carve out an hour on Sunday morning, for example, when everyone sits together and reads whatever they choose. This can help reinforce how important reading is for everyone—and help make it a habit. Remember not to judge your child's choices. Make the message clear, especially for struggling and reluctant readers, that any reading is good reading.

5. Keep it light. If your middle-school child struggles with reading, help make the task less threatening. You don't want her to feel scared or intimidated, so keep things positive. You can do this by allowing her to take baby steps and trying not to criticize too much. Validate your child's choices, and notice and praise her progress. You can support your child best by meeting her where she is, not by acting disappointed if she isn't yet where you want her to be.

6. Find a compelling series. Encourage your middle-schooler to read the first book in a series. If she gets hooked by the first book, she can follow the same characters or themes in subsequent books. It's great motivation for reluctant readers to pick up another book right after they've just finished one. Kids with learning and attention issues may feel anxious or fearful about starting new books, but reading another book in a familiar series can help erase those negative feelings.

7. Give books as gifts. Every so often surprise your child with fun books—little presents out of the blue. This helps create the sense that books are exciting and desirable. For kids with reading issues, it's helpful to choose books about their favorite interests. For example, if your child loves sports or film stars, give her books that tap into those topics.

8. Engage in meaningful discussions. Middle and high school students want to feel grown-up and mature. Treat your child that way and she's likely to rise to the occasion. Ask tough questions about the books your child reads. Debate different points of view. If she has issues reading text but can understand higher-level ideas, you can facilitate discussions by sharing the task of reading with her or helping her find the right assistive technology and then discussing the material together afterward.

9. Explain how reading will help your child pursue her passion. Kids who are frustrated with school often ask "Why do I need to learn this?" When it comes to reading, the answer to this question is easy: Your child needs to read in order to learn everything else she wants to know. For example, if your child really likes science, make clear to her that even hands-on science involves some reading. Help your child understand that she can overcome her struggles with reading through practice. And let her know why her effort will be worth it!

10. Tie reading into her social life. Leverage your child's interest in social media and texting. Even if the content isn't educational, these formats can give your child reading practice in a way that doesn't feel like work. Helping your child understand what she's reading can make her feel more confident about joining the conversation. For example, have your child post on social media what book they are reading and see what type of response are created from the post.