

What should I do if/when my child tries to avoid reading?

Question 14 from *Helping Your Child Become a Reader*
(Scanlon, Anderson, Barnes, Morse, & Yurkewecz-Stellato, 2024¹)

There are several useful ideas that can help children develop enthusiasm for reading. Many of them were addressed in previous questions. Here we briefly review those earlier suggestions and add others.

Choose easy reading materials. Children will enjoy reading more when they are able to identify most (almost all) of the words easily and can concentrate on understanding and enjoying what they read.

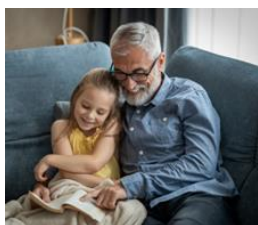
Offer both fiction and non-fiction reading materials. Some children prefer informational (non-fiction, fact-based) texts. Selecting texts about topics that interest individual children has the potential to support an interest in reading.

Take turns reading to each other. When an adult reads with a child, it creates a more enjoyable experience. The child is likely to want to read more, especially when reading more difficult texts. When taking turns, the adult and child might read every other page or paragraph or the adult might read the entire text to the child first (for very short books) and then listen to the child read what the adult just read.



Talk about what is read. Having conversations about the characters, events, and/or information in the text will help to encourage an interest in reading. Conversations can/should occur before, during and after reading a text. And, discussions should be conversational, not test-like. Remember, the

goal is to get children interested in reading and to view it as a form of entertainment and a way to learn about the world. Recall conversations you have with others about your own reading. Think about how you've talked with your child about television shows and videos you've watched together. Try to have similar conversations around the materials you read together. For example, you might say things like:



- I wonder what will happen next.
- What do you think is going to happen?
- I bet he's going to....
- Huh, that isn't what I expected. How about you?
- Look at her face! She looks....(mad, excited, confused...) Or – what do you think she's feeling?
- What would you do if that happened to you?
- Interesting! I never knew....
- I'm confused about what the author just told us. Let's read it again to try to figure it out.
- Why do you think...?

¹ The complete 23 question booklet can be accessed at: eltep.org/isa-parent-booklet
All individual questions and the complete booklet can be shared for non-commercial purposes.

Read the same text more than once. Many children enjoy, and benefit from, reading the same text multiple times. This can be a real confidence builder because children are likely to find it easier and easier to read the text each time. When a text is easy to read, readers are likely to read it smoothly and to sound more like a storyteller than like someone who is learning to read. The feeling of reading smoothly builds confidence. Further, repeated readings can help children to increase the number of words they can read without effort. For informational texts, reading the text more than once increases the likelihood that children will remember the information encountered in the text.



Engage children in playful practice activities. Beginning readers need to learn lots of details about the workings of written English such as the names and sounds of the letters, how to write them, and how the letters in printed words are related to the sounds in spoken words. When children become fast and accurate with such skills, they will be able to devote most of their thinking to making sense of the things that they read and to creating meaning in the things they write. Therefore, it can be helpful to engage them in some playful practice activities to help them become automatic with letter- and word- level skills. For example, for children who are learning the names or sounds of specific letters or to read specific words, the letters/words can be written on cards and used to play games. (It is important to make sure that the children view the cards in the proper orientation [right side up]. Putting a dot at the top of each card can help with this.)

Below are some examples of games that children often enjoy and that help them build skill with letters and words. Note that it is useful to try to ensure that children are frequently the winners in these games. Because a lot of their attention will be focused on letter or word identification, they will have less attention to devote to focusing on the games' strategies and/or remembering the locations of specific items. We want these games to be motivating!

- **Tic Tac Toe** – This version of the game is played with the letters or words children are learning. Each player uses a different color marker/pencil/crayon to write their letter or word. On their turn, each player picks a card from the deck, names the letter (or sound of the letter) or the word (with help if needed) and then writes the letter or word in one of the squares on a Tic Tac Toe board.
 - If the game is focused on **practicing letter names**, players name the letter they pick, write the letter, and then name the letter again.
 - If the focus is on **practicing letter sounds**, players name the letter they pick, name the sound, write the letter, and then name the letter and the sound again.
 - If the focus is on **practicing words**, each player would name the word they pick, name the letters in the word as they write it, and then name the word again.

The winner is determined by having three items of the same color in a row. (Using a dry-erase board with the Tic Tac Toe grid marked off with tape can save paper and decrease the time needed to play each game. Further practice with letter or word identification can be provided by asking the child to erase specific letters or words at the end of each game.

- **Concentration/Memory** – Two copies of each letter or word are needed for this game. The cards would be shuffled and laid out in rows with the letter/word side down. On their turn, players would turn over two cards in hopes of finding a match.
 - If the game is focused on **practicing letter names**, players name the letters they turn over.

- If the focus is on **practicing letter sounds**, players name each letter they turn over and name the sound.
- If the focus is on **practicing words**, each player would name the words they turn over.

When a match is found, the player takes the cards. The winner is the player with the most cards when all the cards have been picked up.