

Overcoming Reading Barriers

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Every January, I set a goal for the number of books I will read over the course of the next 12 months. I try to compete with my friend from college, Nick. His stats increase each year and I typically find myself hopelessly behind within a matter of a few months. While I enjoy the competition and I do enjoy the relaxing gift of reading a book, this wasn't always the case. I distinctly remember only wanting to read Garfield or Calvin and Hobbes cartoon books when I was a kid. My parents never wavered in their efforts to find some books I would enjoy. One summer in late elementary school, my mom brought home Drummer Boy at Bull Run by Gilbert Morris. Something about the historical context and the relatable teen drama and issues had me enthralled. I proceeded to read the entire series. From that point forward, I am always looking for the next book that will captivate me the same way I was captivated that summer.

The point is that the joy of reading doesn't typically come from an innate joy of books or love with text. It usually comes from routines and procedures that are set by parents. These routines and expectations provide the opportunity for kids to learn to love reading, usually from finding that one book or series that helps them catch the bug. But this environment does not come about accidentally or without some barriers. Let's look at some of the challenges parents face in building a love of reading in their children, along with some ideas to help address those challenges.

Barrier 1: Your child's belief that they don't like to read

The challenge here is that reading is perceived to be relatively boring compared to other forms of entertainment available in your child's life: phones, iPads, TV, video games, and social media, just to name a few. To combat this challenge, you need to create a setting in which reading can be enjoyable as well. For younger children, creating a routine where you read together as a family brings a significant amount of joy and purpose to reading. For older children, you may need to find books about topics connected to their media-obsessed lives, including graphic novels, comics, and anime. These can serve as a bridge between modern media and books.

Barrier 2: It's not a normal part

of their lives

Kids who do not see their parents read and have not ever experienced reading as a family may not see the emphasis on literacy they need to believe that reading is actually important. Sure, parents tell their children they should be reading more because the teacher and society say they should. Without a model in their children's lives or an expectation for them to read, it doesn't really seem all that important. To address this issue, set time for family reading. Perhaps this could be the last 30 minutes before bed time, an enjoyable family activity after dinner, or a Saturday morning time to relax. Whatever you choose, setting an example for your children will make a big difference. They mimic what we do much more than they do what we say. Give them a positive reading example to imitate!

Barrier 3: Just Life

Parents and kids are all busy: work, chores, sports, music, plays, school activities, church, martial arts...the list goes on. Whatever it is you and your children are busy with, most things tend to take a front seat to reading. We prioritize all of our scheduled events, leaving little time for leisure and relaxation. If reading is not already part of your routine, it may seem like a chore to add it into the mix. There's no simple solution here. Sometimes as parents we have to make a sacrifice and do things that will benefit our children, even if we don't feel like it. Our goal here is to help kids learn to love reading and to help them see that reading can be a relaxing pastime.

Prioritize reading, even if you only start with 20-30 minutes a couple of times per week. Make sure kids know that reading is a priority for you and for them.

As with most things, there is no magic cure or instantaneous fix. We have to make intentional choices and steps that will build a literacy-focused environment at home. Taking these steps will help. Comment if you have more ideas for helping kids learn to love reading!