Why Reading?

As a parent, you play an essential role in your child’s/teen’s success. There are intentional ways to grow a healthy parent-child and parent-teen relationship, and engaging in family reading time provides a perfect opportunity.

Step 1. Get Your Child/Teen Thinking by Getting Their Input

- Get curious about the books your child/teen is reading at school.
- “How much reading homework do you usually get from school everyday?”
- “Considering all of the activities that typically take place after school, when is the best time to read?”

Discuss challenges. In Step 2, plan to teach what they can do instead.

Tip Approach reading time as a treat, not a chore. If you save reading for after things like doing homework or getting ready for bed, then reading can be viewed as a desirable time to be together.

Tip Allow your child/teen to select their own books that look interesting and desirable. You can learn more about books to offer your child/teen on the online review tool from Common Sense Media (or download their app). It offers the developmental appropriateness of each book and a sneak preview along with central themes.

Step 2. Teach New Skills by Interactive Modeling

- When your child/teen invites you to learn more about what they are reading or asks a question, listen with interest or ask: “What captures your interest when you start reading a book? Which character do you identify with the most? What are some themes in the book that are similar or different to how you are living?”
- Model reading. Remember, your child/teen is watching you and will notice if you do or do not read around your home.
- Research information together in books. Although it’s tempting to do all of your research about a topic online, be sure to include books or articles in your research.
- Teach the essential “brain break.” Breaks do not represent weakness or a lack of persistence. In fact, our brains work better if we take frequent breaks. Children/Teens need processing time if they are studying, learning to read, or reading a longer book.
Parents do not need to be subject matter experts EVER! Indeed, your child/teen may be reading about topics that you may not know anything about. That is exciting! Encourage them to share this knowledge with you. Appear interested and engaged. Model actively learning. If they need information, be a research assistant and provide the support they need to find the right information.

Step 3. **Practice** to Grow Skills, Confidence, and Develop Habits

- Use “I’d love to hear…” as a way to get your child/teen talking about what they are reading. This might sound like, “I remember reading this book. I’d love to hear what it’s about?”
- Recognize any effort your child/teen makes either reading or sharing with you what they are reading. Say, “I so appreciate hearing about the book through your lens, because you have such an interesting way of looking at things.”
- Proactively remind your child/teen to help them be successful. This might sound like, “I am looking forward to hearing about the latest in the book that you are reading.”

**Trap** Resist the temptation to nag. Children/Teens often need more time to perform tasks that challenge them even if we believe they are simple and don’t require much time. If you nag them about reading, they will resist. Your waiting could make all the difference in whether they are able to do what you need them to do.

Step 4. **Support** Your Child’s/Teen’s Development and Success

- Model and promote a learning attitude. Be curious about your child/teen and what they are learning.
- Talk positively about reading and share your interest in reading.
- Coach your child/teen to get more support if needed. Encourage them to talk with their teachers to get book recommendations or alternatives.
- Stay engaged. Read with your child/teen, discuss books regularly, make a plan to read a particular book that also has a movie, watch the movie after reading the book, and compare the stories.

**Tip** Become aware of your own reactions to reading. Be sure that the tone and attitude you bring is one of enjoyment, curiosity, and learning.

Step 5. **Recognize** Effort and Quality to Foster Motivation

- Recognize and call out when it is going well: “I noticed you’re almost at the end of your book. You must be enjoying it! Excellent.”
- Recognize small steps along the way. Appreciate your child/teen when they share about a book that they are reading: “I really enjoy hearing about what you are reading. It’s like I am reading it through an entirely different lens.”

**Tip** Be specific. “Good job” seems to not carry much meaning. However, a specific compliment about a pointed behavior - “You ended your video game when the timer went off and got out your reading for school - love seeing that!” - can promote more of the same.
**Trap** If you focus only on outcomes - “You got your reading done” - you miss the chance to influence the process. Better to say - “You stayed focused, managed your frustration, and worked through that challenging section.”

**Trap** Avoid gifts or other physical rewards for performance. These actually have a de-motivating effect on children/teens. When you remove the money, for example, have they internalized the skills and also the sense of responsibility for performing them? There’s less of a chance if you’ve offered a “bribe.” Focus on your attention as the best reward. Your attention and recognition add to their feelings of competence. This is an essential strategy in discipline for skill building.

**Celebrate yourself** for making it your parenting priority to work on cultivating the social and emotional skills that are most critical for your child’s/teen’s success today and in their future!