



Reading Summary

Why Reading?

As a parent or someone in a parenting role, you play an essential role in your child's success. There are intentional ways to grow a healthy parent-teen relationship, and growing skills in reading is a great way to do it.

Tip These steps are done best when you and your teen are not tired or in a rush.

Tip Intentional communication and a healthy parenting relationship support these steps.

Step 1. Get Your Teen Thinking by Getting Their **Input**

- Get curious about the books your teen is reading at school.
- Ask: *"What are you interested in reading these days?"*
- Ask: *"I know there's a lot you have to read for school. What are you reading for pleasure?"*
- Allow choice to add to your teen's sense of control and motivation to read.
 - *"How do you want to spend your time after school?"*
 - *"Considering all of the activities that typically take place after school, when is the best time to read?"*
- Consider joining a book club with your teen where you both read the same book.
- Approach reading time as a treat, not a chore.
- Allow your teen to select their own books to read.
- Don't attempt to champion a particular book.
- Make a family rule to turn screens off one hour before typical bedtime.
- Create a space. Take some time to determine a consistent space for reading time.
- Create a family reading rule.

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

Tip Make it fun! Designing a reading spot together can be an enjoyable experience. Allow your teen to pick out their own pillows, bean bag chair, or bookmarks.

Step 2. **Teach** New Skills by Interactive Modeling

- When your teen invites you to learn more about what they are reading or asks a question, listen with interest or ask, *"I have noticed you reading a lot of historical fiction. What interests you about historical fiction? What are some of your favorite books? What interests you about this story or these characters? What are the*

characters feeling or thinking? Why are they making the choices they make? Would you have made different choices? What are you learning about?"

- Share your curiosity and interest in the subject but do not provide an answer or make conclusions since you want your teen to come to their own conclusions.
- Parents do not need to be subject matter experts EVER! Your teen may have questions about what they are reading. If you find that you are struggling to get the right answer, take a step back. Ask yourself, "How can I provide the guidance and support for them to research and learn the answer to the question or solve the problem themselves (even if they get it wrong)?"
- Model reading. Parents who read have teens who read.
- Research together. Although it's tempting to do all of the research about a topic online, be sure to include books or articles in the 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. Teens need processing time if they are studying, learning to read, or reading a longer book.
- Support your teen's reading habit!
- Depending upon your teen's school, often the task of reading can become highly stressful. Remove that burden at home. Focus on joy and connection. Make reading fun.

Tip Research shows that many boys tend to stop reading for pleasure by their own choice around nine or ten.¹ Experts suspect this is because boys tend toward nonfiction topics like the natural world or how-to topics like how to build a treehouse. They might also gravitate toward graphic novels or comics. Experts suspect that parents can voice their disapproval of these reading choices and inadvertently discourage reading. Be sure you leave judgment of book choices behind and only encourage their reading. Nonfiction and graphic novels are excellent choices if they interest your young adult. As long as it's safe content, offer your support and interest.

Tip The "brain break" is a strategy that is often used by emotionally intelligent adults. So, if your teen questions the validity of what you are doing, you can reassure them that this is a form of self-management that skilled adults use to move through difficult problems or work.

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

- Use "I'd love to hear..." as a way to get your teen talking about what they are reading. This might sound like, *"I'd love to hear more about the book you are reading."*
- At school, your teen will routinely have to provide summaries of books they are reading. Asking your teen about the books they are reading helps them practice this skill. Ask:
 - *"What keeps you interested in the book?"*
 - *"Tell me a little bit about the story."*
 - *"What do you hope happens in the story?"*
 - *"What's the overall message of the book?"*
 - *"What do you think about the message?"*
- Recognize effort by saying "I notice..." statements like, *"I notice how you sat down to read without my prompting. Looks like you're enjoying it. Great!"*
- Proactively remind your teen to help them be successful. You may whisper in your teen's ear, *"Remember what time it is? What are you reading today?"*

Trap Resist the temptation to nag. Teens are eager to push away and demonstrate their independence. Have confidence that your modeling is enough to promote a positive reading habit.

Step 4. **Support** Your Teen's Development and Success

- Promote a learning attitude. Your comments and reflections will matter greatly in how competent they feel to meet any learning challenge especially when it comes to tackling difficult text or moving through research.
- Ask key questions. *"It looks like you aren't really enjoying this book. What might help?"* or *"How are you feeling about your reading tonight?"*
- Coach on communications. You might then say, *"Seems like you are unsure which sections you need to read. How can you get this figured out?"*
- Stay engaged. It can be highly motivating for a teen when a parent reads their own favorite book alongside keeping them company.

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

- Notice when all is moving along smoothly. *"I notice you are almost at the end of your book. You must be enjoying it!"*
- Recognize small steps along the way. Find small ways your teen is making an effort, and let them know you see them.
- Build celebrations into your routine. For example, *"Let's take a break together when you're done with your reading, and we can play a quick game."*

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

References

1. Telford, L. (1999). A Study of Boys' Reading, *Early Child Development and Care*, 149:1, 87-124.

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