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## Why Boys Don't Read – Part 1 of Many

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Obviously, the title is a bit hyperbolic. It's not that boys are all illiterate--though an alarming number do score very low on reading proficiency tests. (In fact, about a quarter of 12th-grade boys with a parent who graduated from college still scored "below basic" in reading proficiency on national assessments.) Rather, it's more an expression of frustration from parents and teachers who notice a lack of interest in reading in boys, whether for school work or recreationally. It's hard to deny that improved literacy and language skills are tied to reading, so getting boys to read more (and more advanced materials) is fundamental to improving their skills, test scores, grades, etc.

It's a complex issue, with a multitude of explanations and variables. Still, part of the reason can be breathtaking in its obviousness:

Why don't boys read?

Because not enough people are reading to them.

Part of instilling an interest in reading comes from reading out loud to children at a young age. Most parents have heard this at some point—I believe I even got pamphlets and free storybooks when I brought my son home from the hospital. However, some surveys have found that (for whatever reason) boys tend to be read aloud to less often than girls.

I know from experience that, at the end of a long day, the prospect of corralling a young boy and getting him to sit still while you read him a story is daunting. And I've had other moms tell me that they would like to read to their sons, but just can't get them to sit for story time. So here are a few hints for those who want to help their active sons get an early start on reading.

Don't worry about a little wiggling. Boys like—even need—to move. Trying to enforce total quiet and stillness will just leave you both feeling frustrated and ready to give up. A little fidgeting doesn't mean that he can't still follow the story, and, in fact, you might be able to turn the fidgets into participation. Encourage him to point out things in the story (or pictures), and allow for commentary, whether it's a discussion of why a character does something, or simply agreement that, yes, the fish is really very blue.

Try to pick books that spark his interest. (More on boys' reading preferences in our next installment.) No matter how sweet it may be, or how much you loved it as a child, sometimes a book is just not going to be very interesting to your boy. Personally, I would love it if my son had a greater interest in certain books featuring bunny rabbits and mothers, but he vastly prefers the silliness and rhymes of Dr. Seuss. Though I may be tired of reading about Sneetches, the fact that he gets so interested in the story makes up for that. On occasion, we will even let him loose in the children's section of the local bookstore and let him pick out a new book. It's rarely a classic of children's literature, but he now has a special interest in reading that book.

Finally, reading together is not just for toddlers. As they grow older and start to learn to read and write, don't abandon story time—you can still help foster a love of reading (and improve their literacy skills). Try having your child read to you, or picking special stories to read together. I may be a little weary of Green Eggs and Ham, but I can't wait to start with Narnia and Horatio Hornblower.

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