

What can you do if your child hates reading?

August 19 2024, by Genevieve McArthur



Credit: Gustavo Fring from Pexels

During Book Week, we will see countless photos on social media of happy kids dressed as characters from their favorite books, while schools hold daily events celebrating the joy of reading.

It's a fun time for many children, who relish the chance to dress up as

Hermione from Harry Potter or Dog Man and talk about books with their friends and teachers.

But what if your child doesn't like reading?

It's a growing challenge in many parts of the world. A 2023 [survey](#) found more than 50% of 8- to 18-year-olds in the United Kingdom do not enjoy reading in their spare time. In the [United States](#), only 14% of 13-year-old students report reading for fun almost every day.

In [Australia](#), it's slightly better—but about 30% of Australian children aged 5 to 14 say they do not read for pleasure.

If you have a child who's reluctant to read, what can you do? A good first step is to find out why.

Why is it important for kids to enjoy reading—or at least not hate it?

It might be tempting to give a kid a "pass" if they don't like reading, but this will not help them in the long term. Most jobs rely on reading and writing—even those that are more practical. For example, trades involve lots of forms, instructions and certification.

Once a child has been taught to read, they need to practice to get good at it—or at least good enough. This is why liking reading, or at least not hating it, is important. It gets children to practice.

What's the reason?

There are [several reasons](#) a child may say they hate reading:

- they might not be as good at reading as other kids in the class, so they form the impression—from their own observations or feedback from others—they are not good at reading
- this may make them worry or even fear reading, particularly in front of other people
- so they avoid reading simply to stop feeling bad.

But even if a child has no problems with reading, they still may not like it.

Perhaps they have other interests (for example, computing, sport or music). Or they can't see the point of reading ("what does it do for me?").

How can you work out the root cause?

A good place to start is to think about what your child says about reading, or what they have said in the past.

Is there a chance they are struggling with reading at school? Do they think they are "bad" at it? Does reading make them feel worried or "switched off"? Do they try to actively avoid reading? Do they find it hard to find something to read that interests them?

If nothing comes into mind, you could try to talk to your child—in a gentle way—to see if any of these things are an issue for them. If you are worried this might end up in an argument, or with them saying "I don't know, I just hate it," ask their teacher.

Their teacher should know where your child sits within the class in terms of their reading ability and feelings about reading, and if they try to avoid reading for some reason.

A second opinion?

If you need another opinion, you may wish to take your child to a reading specialist. Before you book a session, ask if they can assess your child's confidence, engagement and emotions around reading as well as their skills. These [all play a role](#) in how well your child reads and how much they enjoy reading.

Also make sure the specialist can provide recommendations about next steps based on the results, rather than give you a result with no further action.

What can you do at home?

First, help your child find books or articles on topics that [genuinely interest them](#). Perhaps take them to the local library or bookshop so they can choose their own book. Or search through your local [street libraries](#) together on a walk. Show an interest in their interests.

Second, help your child find a [meaningful goal](#) for their reading. Are they determined to read all the books in a series? Or do they have more practical goals ("I need to learn how to fix my bike")? Show an interest in how they are tracking towards their goal.

Third, support your child's [reading self-efficacy](#), which is their perception they can meet their reading goals. Try to avoid showing disappointment if their progress is slow. Take an interest in what they are learning through their reading.

A final consideration

At some point, you might find your child is discouraged because they

have chosen a text that is too easy (which is boring) or too hard (which is demoralizing).

In the first case, you can say their reading is "far too good for this book, so let's find something more interesting tomorrow."

In the second case, you can offer to help them read every second page, or the bits they feel they cannot manage. That way you can get through the book together.

In time, you will both learn how to find texts that are not too easy and not too hard.

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