

Q. How do I engage my 4 year old child with reading?

Here is a wealth of tips from **Lauren Colvin** on how to get children really interested in and enjoying reading.

As with all areas of learning, the key to supporting a child towards acquiring the ability to read is to recognise and cater for their uniqueness in order to successfully entice them in the process. Providing an environment that helps children to develop a deep enjoyment of reading can be done in numerous ways.

One of the most important components towards gaining true appreciation and pleasure of reading comes through our ability to understand content. The wider the breadth of a child's individual experiences, the more likely they will be able to relate to and understand what they are reading. In order for a child to therefore progress with their



relate what they're reading to their own experiences, it makes it more real and relevant to them. It is this connection with the

events or characters of a story that the real enjoyment of reading comes and hence 'favourite' books develop.

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motivate them to improve their skills.

Take advantage of things you do with your child that can help to develop interest and skills that support reading. Experiences such as cooking together can invite the use of rich vocabulary through describing the different tastes and textures involved. Tell stories during times when the surroundings or situation helps the story come to life, for example, walking through the woods and telling the story of Little Red Riding Hood or The Gruffalo. Drawing your child's attention to text in the environment, such as pointing out signs helps your child to develop an

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reading, the focus is not just on their ability to read words, but also on their comprehension. As a parent you can support this in a number of ways. Providing your child with a range of diverse experiences enables them to begin developing their own understanding, opinions, thoughts and memories of many different things. Visiting new places for the first time invites your child to engage their senses and connect different things together. Different smells, for example, can trigger memories so strong and real that you're suddenly immersed in a flurry of vivid memories and feel like you've been transported back in time. A child reading about the description and feeling of the sea splashing against their legs, who has never actually been in this situation, will not be able to associate with the experience as deeply as a child who has felt such things first hand. When a child is therefore able to

Connecting what your child already knows whilst reading sharpens their focus and deepens understanding. You can model how to make connections by sharing your own associations as you read aloud. If a book, for example, mentions places you've been to together, you could talk about your memories of those places and then invite your child to have a turn. Creating visual images makes stories more fun and memorable. You can help your child to do this by describing the pictures you're seeing in your own imagination. Ask your child to share the images they have created in their own heads. You might even ask your child to draw what's in their imagination. Even after children learn to read by themselves, it's still important for you to read aloud together. By reading stories that are on their interest level, but beyond their reading level, you can stretch young readers' understanding and

understanding of the importance of reading and the many ways in which words are used all around them. Use your child's interests as a lead, such as if your child likes buses, point out bus stop signs or the words on the front of a bus that display its destination.

As with all areas of development it is crucial to draw upon your child's interests in order to capture their attention and to make reading more enjoyable for them. Provide books that are appealing and suitable for your child, such as books with attractive covers and larger print, diverse, and colorful illustrations, comical stories or themes in line with their interests. Offering a rich variety of books is also an important aspect towards engaging your child. Different types of books provide different benefits, for example, fiction helps children to develop imagination and fact helps to expand their knowledge. Children like to feel valued and that their

thoughts and opinions matter. Give your child the opportunity to choose the books they are reading or that you read to them. Much has been written about the powerful impact of student choice in reading. When students are given the opportunity to choose what they read, they will be more likely to read.

Library cards are a great way for a child to choose books freely within the appropriate sections of a library without the added expense of having to buy new books too frequently. This is particularly important for reluctant readers. These readers often have difficulty connecting with a text because they see the reading of literature as an arduous task rather than an enjoyable one. If the child is able to follow their own interests and choose books that appeal to them they are more likely to become excited about books and willing to read.

Using books as a way of supporting children through current or new experiences in their life is another good way to draw children towards reading. The relevance of the plot will enable your child to really connect with the book. As your child approaches a major developmental milestone or a potentially

stressful experience, sharing a relevant story is a great way to help ease the transition. For instance, if your little one is nervous about starting school, reading a story dealing with this topic shows them that their anxiety is normal. This opens up the conversation indirectly and can help children to see other perspectives and feel more at ease that it is something they don't have to cope with alone.

E-books are a more recent popular way of reading. There is research to suggest that what is read is more important towards a child's development than how it is read. Audio narration and animations provided by e-books can add a lot of flair to the experience of reading. My hesitation around this however, would be that the extra visual stimulus provided by an e-book could take away the opportunity for a child to use their own imagination to build on what they are reading and seeing. Children who play on iPads and other electronic devices regularly become used to this high level of stimulus they provide and can find concentrating on things that don't provide this same level of visual incentive challenging. This also wades

into the controversial subject of the amount of screen time children should be exposed to. It is important that a high level of awareness is demonstrated towards the content of what a child is subjected to whilst watching television or using an iPad or computer. An e-book, for example, would be a good way to allow your child some screen time in a controlled and safe way as opposed to other electronic games, apps or programs that they could access on such devices. Studies have shown that the light that is emitted by most e-readers and electronic devices can affect sleep. It would therefore be advisable to avoid reading e-books at bedtime. If you choose to provide e-books for your child, then a balance between paper and electronic readers would help to provide them with a rounded reading experience.

Being in touch with your child's interests and providing opportunities and choices in tune with this will help to capture their attention and engage them in reading. Instead of being seen as a chore or a task, reading will become a nurturing activity that the two of you can enjoy together.

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