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November 2017

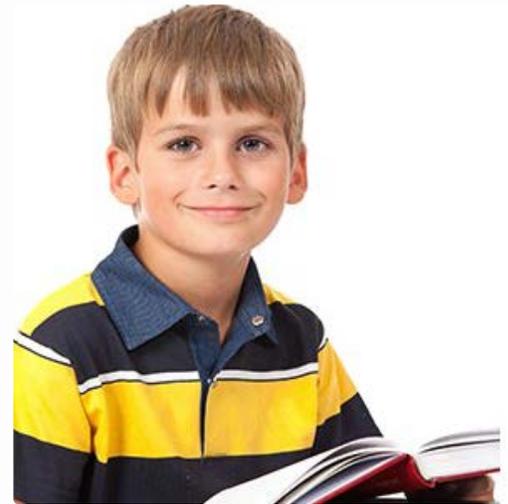
Inspiring a Love of Reading Books in Dyslexic Children

By Don Winn

I am passionate about motivating struggling readers. Many kids don't think of themselves as readers at all (or as good students) because of dyslexia, ADD or other challenges. It's human nature to avoid doing things that are difficult or just plain monotonous. This is especially true of children. But what most children don't generally comprehend (I certainly didn't) is that we don't learn to read just for the sake of reading. First, we learn to read, and then for the rest of our lives, we read to learn. The sad truth is that many children with learning difficulties view reading as a chore. How can they be motivated to persevere? Two successful approaches include helping children develop a love of story, and helping them create self-identities as readers.

As a dyslexic, I know what it's like to struggle to read. My grandmother regularly read aloud with me, and this helped me develop a love of great stories. That exposure to the wonder of books planted a new idea in my brain that said, "Even though reading is so hard, these stories are great!" I wanted more. The reward of stories made the effort of reading worthwhile, and that love of story is what helps me persevere as a reader, and now as a writer.

As a kid, reading stories helped me see myself differently. That was important, since nearly all of us who are dyslexic, or who struggle otherwise to learn, judge ourselves harshly. We compare ourselves to our peers who seem to learn with little or no effort, and unfortunately, we can gain the impression from even well-meaning educators that we're unmotivated, stupid, slow or lazy.



Motivating the frustrated dyslexic reader goes beyond just teaching the mechanics of reading. The mechanical act of reading will never be effortless for the dyslexic. Without a love of story, most struggling readers won't persevere. So what are some ways that parents and educators can help foster a love of story?

- Provide children with materials and prompts to draw illustrations depicting story ideas.
- Encourage children to make up their own plays and dramas based on beloved characters. What adventure would they like to see their hero have next?
- Read and/or listen to stories together regularly.
- Audiobooks are a wonderful way to help your child fall in love with great stories. Bookshare.org offers free audiobooks to people with dyslexia or other print disabilities.
- As you read together, ask your child to describe what they see in pictures in books, and have them guess what will happen next.
- Look for stories that include heroes of self-reference for your children. Heroes of self-reference are characters who have struggles similar to those

your child faces. As they see their beloved characters discovering their strengths and contributing to the success of the adventure, the children begin to believe in their own potential.

- Develop questions around the main characters that the child can fill in from his own imagination: What would this character's room look like, and why? What would his favorite hobby be? What is he most afraid of? What is he most proud of?
- Discuss ways the child may be like a character in the book. Does she share feelings or experiences? Is there common ground in talents or gifts? Reading about the experiences of others helps kids learn about themselves.

Conversations involving questions like these help children use their own imaginations to become participants in the story. By helping them to stretch their imaginations and enjoy the "worlds behind the words," children can learn to see that the reward of reading is worth the extra work.

Finally, the words we as parents and educators choose to use as we communicate about reading can be powerful motivators. For example, children are much more likely to help clean up their messes if they have been encouraged to think of themselves as "helpers" - a noun - instead of someone who is supposed "to help" clean up - a verb. The reason for this is that using a noun (the word "helper") " *may send a signal that helping implies something positive about one 's identity, which may in turn motivate children to help more.* " according to Christopher J. Bryan, Assistant Professor of Psychology at the University of California, San Diego.

A reader is someone who reads. And these kids *do* read. In fact, they work much harder to read than those without learning challenges. If we are measuring effort, not just results, struggling readers are actually greater readers than those who are not challenged. To echo Dr. Bryan's words above, wouldn't using nouns instead of verbs when talking to kids with learning challenges also imply something positive about their identities, thereby improving motivation? In a world focused solely on results, not effort, discovering personal motivation based on a positive identity concept can be a force for good for the struggling student.

Here are a few suggestions:

- Instead of saying, "Let's read a story," say, "Let's be readers." Get even the youngest children used to the idea that they are readers.
- Replace "How was school today?" with "Were you a good student today?" Encourage them to share the reason for their answers.
- Tell kids stories about things they have already learned or mastered. Statements like, "You've always been a curious learner!" or "You worked so hard at that until you figured it out!" help them recognize that they have a lifelong history of being good learners and hard workers, not just struggling students. Feeling the mantle of success on their shoulders helps build motivation for them to continue to learn and grow as readers and students.

Don M. Winn is an award-winning author and dyslexia advocate. He has written numerous articles about dyslexia and helping struggling readers. His blog archives are available at donwinn.com

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