Active Reading with Kids!

Learning to read is a process that assists children as they learn to communicate and make sense of what they experience. It also provides great fun for both the adult and the child while building a strong relationship.

The most important aspect of the reading process is to remember to read *with your child*, as opposed to reading *to your child*. Reading with your child is a collaborative process that engages you and your child in navigating the book’s story, characters, and your own ideas about what is happening. As your child ages and becomes a more independent reader, active reading strategies are still valuable tools when discussing interests and overcoming new challenges.

Practice Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a way of thinking about things not as they are but as they could be. It recognizes the potential for many different outcomes. Mindfulness is an active and intentional way of being in the moment with your child by following their imagination to extend thinking and learning.

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Strategies for Active Reading

**Questioning** — *Assessment questions* are used to help determine where a child is in his or her thinking. For example, “Do you know what color that is?” Many times these questions can be answered with a single word response like “yes”, “no”, or “blue”. These questions determine where to go next with learning. *Assistance questions* are open-ended and are used to evaluate what a child is experiencing as well as what others are thinking. Replies usually require an explanation describing the who, what, why, and how. An example is, “What do you think is going to happen next in the story?”.

**Explaining and Instructing** — Sometimes kids need just a single piece of information to make a leap into full understanding. Other times, they just want to know some more information about an interesting topic. It is important to follow the child’s lead when determining when and where to incorporate explanation because you don’t want to get in a habit of answering before examining the teachable moment.

**Modeling** — Adults and older youth are always modeling human behavior and interaction for children. Learning through *observation* is a primary learning strategy. Kids watch how people interact, how to behave in different situations, and how to treat others. Another type of modeling is *imitating* what is seen. By physically acting out what is read, children can learn about their bodies and voices.

**Feedback** — Commenting on a child’s performance can be an effective means of assistance; however, it must be relative to a standard. Saying “good job” is not beneficial feedback because it doesn’t help a child determine the importance of what they are doing. “You did a good job, *because*...” helps children understand the *why* behind thoughts and actions.

**Maintaining Focus** — Sometimes it is hard to maintain a child’s focus. Kids have to learn skills to maintain their focus and follow the story of a book. Rather than using authority to manage distractions, try to offer choices such as finishing a page and then doing something else, stopping now, or skipping ahead. You can also regain focus by asking the child to tell the story or discuss the pictures.