

Fathers can make a difference in getting sons to read

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Engaging boys in reading can be tough. Many parents find that their boys either aren't interested in sitting still long enough, or they often perceive reading as a "girl thing". The consequences of boys not reading as frequently or as copiously as girls can be dire. National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy ([NAPLAN](#)) data shows that girls have consistently outperformed boys in reading across the last six years of assessments. [Research also indicates](#) that boys are three to five times more likely than girls to have a reading or learning disability.

[Experts agree](#) that when it comes to engaging boys with books, the key is reading with dads, uncles and grandfathers. When fathers engage with their sons in reading, the level of boys' engagement, interest and participation are known to change. Dads are able to engage their sons in different ways with books, usually by hooking into shared interests and developing sustainable reading habits.

The following tips are easy ways for dads to start or further develop quality reading relationships with their boys.

Spend quality time reading together

Dads are frequently seen as an [untapped resource](#) when assisting their boys with reading. When boys see their fathers as frequent and resourceful readers, this sets the scene for their future reading lives. Dads who share quality reading time with their sons are role-modelling effective reading behaviours.

Reading at home together is an excellent way to build quality reading time, though also consider making time to head into your son's classroom for reading when you are available. Make a special time together on weekends to venture to the local library or bookstores.

Read about shared interests

Males traditionally have different reading interests than females. This is evident from a quick glance at the magazine section of your local newsagent. Boys therefore usually won't want to read the same thing as their sisters or female classmates will.

Encourage boys to choose what they are interested in reading. If they want to frequently read non-fiction texts about animals or dinosaurs, this is okay. Don't restrict your boys' choice in reading – when choices are restricted, a huge disincentive to read is created.

Dads need to share their favourite texts with their boys – talk about the types of authors, what happens in the story and what the characters are like. If you generally read only

magazines or the sport pages in the paper, talk about these too. This sharing builds strong relationships around reading and demonstrates that reading takes on many different forms.

Read different types of books

Frequently, we get trapped into thinking that there are only one or two types of books that children should be reading. The first is usually picture books, which we then expect children to grow out of as they progress towards reading novels. However, these types of text don't always engage young male readers.

When considering books to suggest to your boys, try to think of a broad range of different types of texts. Comics, or [graphic novels](#) as they are now frequently known, are engaging, fast-paced, detailed and are usually tailored to boys' interests.

Traditionally, it has been considered that reading graphic novels is a lesser form of reading, or the easy option that boys often take. However, the large amount of reading required in most graphic novels provides a great source of reading practice. The detailed and complex illustrations serve as a great in-built support for boys to figure out the meaning of the text and unknown words.

Many traditional print texts that boys love are now also available as graphic novels, such as Emily Rodda's [Deltora Quest](#). These provide a different and often more interesting way to access the text.

Laugh and have fun

Boys love humour, and the plethora of humorous books that are in print makes these a popular choice. By having fun with books, we are encouraging boys to come back and read again and again. Andy Griffiths is a celebrated Australian author and his classic [The Day My Bum Went Psycho](#) is a perfect place to start.

Use technology to engage your boys

[As I have written previously](#), eReaders are often the bridge that is needed to engage a reluctant reader with a new and different text. Many eReading apps and devices support graphic novels, comics, newspapers and magazines. You might find that reading with your son becomes a richer experience when there is a broad range of interesting books to choose from.

Another clever way for time-poor Dads to engage in reading with their boys is to record themselves reading a chapter, or a short piece of text, using the recording function on a smartphone or iPod. This enables your son to read along a favourite text with you, when you can't be present physically. Funny voices when reading always make an enticing surprise for the listener.

Allowing boys the opportunities to see the men in their lives as strong, resourceful and avid readers helps to demonstrate the importance of reading. Take the time to read, discuss and enjoy books with your son, grandson or nephew to help set them up for reading success.