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Nurturing a love of reading for boys

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For some parents, getting their boys interested in reading can be a challenge. Studies consistently show that boys just aren't as interested in it as girls.

"There's not as much literature geared for boys, especially in their early years," says Lorelei Burgess, centre director for Oxford Learning in Halifax. "There tend to be a lot of series that the girls can read, but it doesn't seem to be equal."

She says boys also tend to be more interested in math, science and hands-on activities.

Boys have more trouble with reading than girls. They have higher reading disability rates and delayed development rates.

Biological and environmental factors could account for this, says Dr. John McNamara, an educational psychologist at Brock University in St. Catharines. "The jury's out on what's causing that difference, but the difference exists," he says.

There are a number of things parents can do to get their boys more interested in reading. One is to find books that correspond with the boys' interests.

McNamara recommends building literacy activities into boys' imaginations, "instead of kind of contriving a phonics program that has nothing to do with their interests."

If a boy has an interest in space, the parent could talk with him about this topic and have him work on exercises to learn the names of the planets.

"(When) you're talking about space, you're building their vocabulary, you're building their literacy skills," he says. "They think they're engaging in talking about space or reading about space — which they are — but at the same time, they're just simply building their literacy skills."

Getting a magazine subscription is another way of getting boys more interested in reading, says Burgess.

"The other thing we recommend is having the kids help out and read in situations that aren't necessarily books," says Burgess.

This could mean having the boys read the newspaper to their parents while they are making dinner, or having them help read the recipes being used to make the meal.

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