

Parents' CLIPBOARD

SECONDARY LEVEL

BY THE PARENTS & READING COMMITTEE OF THE COLORADO COUNCIL, INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION

Keeping Your Son In Mind

When supporting the literacy development of our sons, there are two things that parents should consider about the development of the male brain. The areas of the brain responsible for language development/word acquisition and the areas responsible for impulse control tend to develop at a slower rate in boys than in girls. However, as parents there are a few simple things we can do to help bolster the vocabulary development of our sons and help them to boost their literacy and language skills.

Talking and Naming

For infants there is no substitute for simply talking when around your son. You can talk about anything: the weather, your day, or what you are doing that moment. The important thing is that your son hears the pattern of everyday conversation so that he can start to imitate the sounds of language. As your son gets older, start naming objects around the house; don't wait for him to ask for their names. When he is old enough to recognize sight words, use index cards and create nameplates and attach them to everyday household items. This will increase your son's exposure to words while feeding on a strength of the male brain, the ability to interact with objects in three-dimensional space. For adolescent boys, encourage them to keep a bookmark on which to write down unfamiliar words as they read. You can key into their competitive nature by setting a goal of finding new words each week or month. Set a time to discuss the new words with your son and talk about the words in various meanings.

While vocabulary development is an important ingredient in the reading success, parents also need to keep in mind that the regions of the brain responsible for impulse control develop at a slower rate for boys than girls. As a result, it is sometimes difficult for a boy to sit still long enough to get

through a book, short story, or even one page of a book. Instead of fighting this inherent fidgetiness, there are ways parents can use their boy's energy as an ally.

Movement

Another strength of your son's brain comes in its ability to attach learning to movement. For younger boys find stories with active themes and challenge your son to act out sounds, words, or parts of different scenes from the book. This will require your son to actively engage in listening as you read the story in order to accurately depict what is happening. Doing so also allows your son an outlet for his energy. For older boys, allow them to pace while reading if they are having a hard time focusing while seated. Another thing to consider is finding ways to connect reading to various activities. For example, if your son enjoys hiking, take him for a hike and pack a book that deals with hiking or the outdoors in some way. During a rest stop you and your son can read a small section of the book and discuss ways in which it relates to what you are doing. The same strategy can be used for biking, playing sports, or numerous other outdoor activities. Not only do such approaches allow your son

to utilize movement, but they also show him that reading does not always have to be an activity that requires sitting still at a desk.

Through the process of working with your son on his literacy skills and development, remember that boys will be boys and sitting down to read a book may not always be their first choice of leisure time activity. Ultimately, what is most important for your son's literacy development is that he finds some form of text that connects with his interests and that he is constantly exposed to various reading materials.

—J. Derek Scott

