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For the Love of Reading

Fact Sheet #3

The Dream

by Barbara Smith

I recently read a book that I loved. I remember getting near the end and being sad that my time with the characters was about to come to an end. Even then, I was happy to quickly pass it on to a friend and share my wonderful reading experience with her. As the mom of a child with disabilities, it is one of my hopes that my daughter will read a book that she loves so much that she will want to share it with a friend the same way I did.

The Means

In order for this dream to come true for your child as well as mine, our children will need to learn both to read and to love reading. As a parent, most of us don't have training in sound instructional methods for teaching reading to our child. We stay involved with their special education teachers and do everything that we can to support them. Despite the best efforts of the teachers, however, the process of learning how to read for our children is slow and tedious and probably, at best, not fun at all.

The Challenge

Luckily, when I enthusiastically handed my new favorite book to my friend she didn't ask me to "Compare and contrast the central conflict with the last book I read" or even "What is the name of the main character?" I

wouldn't have been able to do either and luckily no one expected me to. I'm not sure that I would want to read if I thought I would always have to answer these types of questions when I was done.

Why Do It?

Our challenge is to make sure that our children get to experience the joys of reading. We want to let them have at least as much time doing pleasurable reading as they spend with frustrating text in language arts class. After all, unless they can see the joy in reading like we do, why would they ever want to do it?



Create Reading Opportunities

Once we get our children interested in reading, it will get easier for them to become better at it and move on to reading

different types of things. With a lot of dedication and creativity, we can surround our children with pleasurable reading opportunities no matter where they are in the process of learning how to read.

Give Them What They Want

When we are trying to get our children to love reading, we need to cater to their interests in an accepting manner. At this stage, anything goes — comic books, magazines, and captioned videos about any topic of interest from outer space to the latest pop singer. Encourage them to spend time reading and re-reading the same thing. Help them see how fun it is to learn new things by read-

ing — show them the power they have by reading to learn. Build on their interest by reading out loud selections that are a little bit too hard for them to read independently.

Give It to Them How They Like It

Think about how your child learns best. As a parent, you are in the best position to make good use of everything you know about your child. Maybe she is musical and has some favorite songs and/or groups. Karaoke, with on screen text of songs she knows by heart, can help reinforce her reading skills by pairing the words with the text and the music. Children who need to move may benefit from obstacle courses that have a few simple directions written at each station along the way. Maybe your son learns best with a hands-on technique. Step-by-step illustrated how-to books on any topic could support his learning style and reading skills at the same time. With creativity, you can find ways to surround your child with text while they are doing what they like.

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existent. These children and their families are tired and frustrated by the process. The solutions offered in this article are not easy, nor are they quick fixes. They require time, creativity, energy, planning, and sometimes a considerable amount of money. However, most of the parents who call us realize that literacy is one crucial key to future success for their child. Most of our children will need to work exceptionally hard to become skilled readers. Loving to read is one of the most important things families can spend their time on. It is only the love of reading that can ever motivate our children to persevere, overcome huge obstacles and become successful readers.

The Reality

We get a lot of calls at PEATC from parents of children with disabilities who are not learning to read – either because the methods used by the school are not successful or are non-



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