

Single Moms Win by Reading with Kids

By Matthew Gollub © 2007

Single mothers who balance work and children deserve a medal just for getting through the week. We know they feel pressed for time and finances. But compared to their happily married counterparts, they may also be more susceptible to feelings of anger, inadequacy and distance from their kids.

The simple ritual of reading with one's children soothes all of these hurts and more. It also provides profound benefits for the child. Consider the following five top reasons for divorced moms to read with their kids each day they're together:

1) Reading stories aloud brings moms and kids closer. If your child is very young, hold him or her on your lap; as they get older, sit side to side on a bed, a sofa or even a park bench. Ask gentle questions as you read and listen to your child's thoughts without judgment. ("What do you think that fox is thinking?" "He sure looks hungry, don't you think?") Remember that books are jumping off points for conversation about the most important thing—yourselves! By relating the book to your own experiences, you really will share more communication, so continue reading books with your child long after he or she can read alone.

2) Sharing books with a child doesn't have to cost a thing. Libraries don't charge admission! Letting your child choose a stack of books, magazines and audio books from a library can make for a delightful, zero-cost outing. Better yet, you'll be equipped for meaningful entertainment at home. Mark the books' due date on your calendar to avoid late fees and remember that many libraries allow books to be renewed by telephone or online. Keeping all library books in a single place is a simple way to make sure they don't get lost.

3) Reading for pleasure gives kids a leg up at school. Children of divorced parents often face disruptions that kids from two parent homes needn't deal with. But by reading with their mom on a regular basis they'll gain background knowledge, vocabulary and a sense of

language that others lack. Studies show that in daily conversation kids use a vocabulary of around 1,000 different words (words like “bus, run, eat, sleep.”). But by the end of 4th grade, they will encounter 19,000 different words in print (words like “navigate, microbe, flutter, slither.”) Reading is the best way to build their vocabulary to help them succeed in the upper grades.

4) Reading together gives your child inner strength. Children of divorced parents tend to grow up faster. They often spend more time after school on their own. Feelings of loneliness and rejection can trigger bad life decisions involving drug abuse, promiscuity, and teen pregnancy as they get older. But with books, a reader is never alone. Through books, young people share the wisdom of others and learn how others overcame similar obstacles. But to *become* a reader, it's best to start early. Without the foundation of language and vocabulary, teens won't be prepared to benefit from books.

5) Reading “works” practically anytime, anywhere. You're waiting in a doctor's office? Read a book. Waiting at a bus stop? Read a book. Carry kids' books in your car. Clip newspaper or magazine articles of interest to your child and keep them in your purse for a quiet moment together. Try making up word games while looking at menus in restaurants. (“How many times do you see the word “potato”?) And don't forget audio books during those long rides in the car.

During times when we wonder what to do when, we can always feel good about reading to our child. It's these quiet times when kids feel nurtured that affect them most profoundly as they grow up. And it's amazing how moms can give so much by simply slowing down and opening a book with their child.

Editor's note: Matthew Gollub is the award-winning children's author of The Jazz Fly and Gobble, Quack, Moon (books with audio CD). His latest work is a picture book for parents called Give the Gift! 10 Fulfilling Ways to Raise a Lifetime Reader, a National Best Books of 2007 Award Finalist. For more information and free literacy hand-outs, please visit www.matthewgollub.com.