

Chapter 1. Why Be in a Mother-Daughter Book Club?

“My daughter can learn from the experiences of other moms, and I can learn from the point of view of other daughters. And I think when we are at book club, we all see our family members a little more as human beings and not just as our mom or daughter. I watch other mothers affirm or question my daughter’s perspectives. She sees other kids listen to her mom. And the amazing thing about books, of course, is the whole of human experience is right there, ready for us to share in it together.” —Joan Overholser, Portland, Oregon

Unexpected Benefits

Ask any mom why she’s in a mother-daughter book club with her daughter, and she’s likely to give you an answer that’s slightly different from that of any other mom you ask. There are many benefits to being in a mother-daughter book club. Some are tangible, like increasing your daughter’s reading skills, while others are harder to quantify, such as keeping a close bond with your daughter as she grows.

You probably already have your own, very specific reasons why you want to create a book club with your daughter. They may include some or all of the following:

- Enhancing your daughter’s reading skills
- Staying connected with your daughter as she grows
- Nurturing your daughter’s self-confidence
- Helping your daughter learn life skills
- Spending social time with other moms/girls
- Building a community of caring friends

It is likely the group you form will come to fulfill many of your expectations, but be prepared to be surprised, and challenged, by your experience in ways you never imagined. Any club you create will be dynamic, changing over the years as all of your members create your group together. Even though your members may have much in common, you will probably all focus on different aspects of your group that are most important to you.

Let’s take a look at each of the major benefits listed above in more detail. Quotes from moms in my own two book clubs show how each person in a club can appreciate

something different about what all of the group's members experience together.

Enhancing Your Daughter's Reading Skills

"When we were first asked to join the book club, my primary motivation for saying yes was to encourage my daughter to learn to read more and to enjoy it. I'm happy to say that has happened. But what I also ended up gaining was a group of wonderful friends and experiences with precious memories of growing together." —Janelle Asai

"Mother-daughter book club discussions help the girls learn how to identify and discuss underlying themes of a book. Developing confidence in this task is helpful during high school and college years." —Karen Berson

Bonnie Lash Freeman, director of training and special projects for the National Center for Family Literacy, in Louisville, Kentucky, says a parent's reading with a child can stimulate two things:

- Motivation to learn to read and to continue reading
- Expansion of vocabulary

"Kids are always watching what you do," says Freeman. "If they see you pick up a book and read, they are more likely to want to read, too. They can also learn more vocabulary because the words in books are different than the words we speak. When you read to your children you can stop and explain words they don't understand, or talk about other words they know that may mean the same thing."

According to the "Kids & Family Reading Report" released recently by Scholastic, "high frequency readers are more likely to have positive self-perceptions and to associate strong reading skills with future success." It also concludes that "parents' reading behaviors are likely to have the greatest impact on kids' involvement with books." Yet the study finds that the number of kids actually reading for fun drops off after age eight.

Being in a mother-daughter book club provides a way for moms to model good reading behavior for their daughters and help them continue to see reading for fun and pleasure as important throughout their lives.

Staying Connected with Your Daughter as She Grows

“Our mother-daughter book club plays a large role in the incredible bond I have with my daughter. Book discussions helped us develop an easy, communicative relationship, encouraging candid dialogue that I cherish . . . and we’ve had fun together.” —Karen Gotting

“A mother-daughter book club is more about the mother-daughter part than about ‘book’ or ‘club.’ You can read a book on your own, but it’s something special to talk about it, argue about it, and share the experience with your daughter. You may even learn something about each other. I guarantee you moments when your daughter’s perspective and insights will fill you with awe and pride.” —Jan Ohman

If you start your mother-daughter book club when your daughter is seven or eight, you may feel as though the two of you share a special bond that will last forever. While that may be true, many girls begin to pull away from their parents, especially their moms, as they near adolescence. They may want to spend less and less time with their moms and more and more time with their peers. Being in a mother-daughter book club won’t prevent that from happening entirely, but it can give you a regularly scheduled activity that opens up dialogue between you and your daughter on important issues.

Even if you begin your group when your daughter is older and already busy with friends and outside activities, book club can give you a way to find quiet moments in the day when you connect one-on-one to read together or talk about what you are reading.

Nurturing Your Daughter’s Self-Confidence

“A mother-daughter book club meeting is a safe place for girls to voice their opinions, especially when those opinions differ from others’ in the group. They learn to be comfortable talking with the moms in the club, as well as with the other girls. It is so gratifying to watch their confidence grow as they come to see themselves as valuable members of the group.” —Ellen Saunders

In many ways, a girl is likely to see her own mom and the other moms in the group as experts on many topics. Younger girls in particular are likely to see moms as authority figures they must defer to. That’s why the mothers in a group, in particular, can help nurture girls’ self-confidence by really listening to what they have to say, and by acknowledging when they learn something from a girl’s comment or consider a new

perspective on an issue being discussed. This type of support can help the daughters see themselves as having valuable opinions that influence others.

Helping Your Daughter Learn Life Skills

“I’ve enjoyed the mother-daughter book club especially because my daughter is a typical teenager, and she’s not very communicative. So the book discussions help us to connect with each other, as well as the other moms and daughters, since she’s more talkative with her peers than with me.” —Lisa Willke

From giving speeches in school to negotiating with friends on the playground, your daughter benefits when she can communicate well. Yet being able to express what you think is an important life skill that many of us—including many moms—have difficulty mastering. Speaking up in a group that is sure to be made up of many different types of personalities is also a good skill to nurture. Mother-daughter book club provides a safe environment where you can practice articulating your thoughts and communicating them.

Plus, when you host book club periodically, you also get the chance to talk with your daughter about planning for a social event. By working together to choose a book for everyone to read and preparing food and drinks for everyone in your group, you help your daughter learn social skills that she can use in other venues as well.

Spending Social Time with Other Moms/Girls

“I’ve found the socializing/dinner aspect just as rewarding as the book reading and discussion. Since our daughters are all in the same grade, it has been comforting to compare and contrast experiences of our parenting/daughter milestones. Bottom line, it’s been a pleasure to watch these young girls grow into accomplished young women within the closer lens of a book club . . . all because I love to read!” —Yasmeen Naziri

Moms and daughters both benefit from the separate social time they may have with their peers at a mother-daughter book club meeting. With all the demands of work, home life, and kids’ activities, moms often don’t make time to socialize with other moms unless it’s at the soccer field or a school event. Yet unstructured social time is where moms are more likely to share information related to child rearing, talk about concerns they have about work or family life, or find out about community events. This opportunity to relax and chat can also be a much-needed break from everyday stress.

When girls have their own social time at book club, they have the chance to relate differently to each other than they do in the classroom, on the playground, or on the sports field. Seeing each other in a neutral setting where there are fewer expectations to perform may help them work through difficulties they have with each other elsewhere. It also helps them build social skills of their own without the constraints of adults watching over them.

Building a Community of Caring Friends

“When I was asked about joining a group, I was recently widowed, and my older children were away at college. I thought, *Oh, how awesome—a place where we can be like all the other family groups, just moms and daughters.* Although I am aware statistically that there are many single parents all over the place, it just so happens that my daughter and I didn’t know very many at all, so we felt ‘different.’ This was a place we didn’t feel so much that way.” —Joan Overholser

“I love being in a mother-daughter book club for the opportunities to read the same books my daughter reads, to share my experiences, feelings, and thoughts with moms and daughters from diverse backgrounds on a wide range of topics. The book club has given me a second chance to grow up through a different lens.” —Showling Shyng

When you are starting out, you have no idea of the life challenges and rewards outside of book club that you may experience through the years. Your book club moms and girls may play very important roles in helping you through any rough spots that come along, as well as celebrating important milestones with you.

In my clubs we have given each other advice and comfort about caring for elderly parents, supported each other through our own health issues, and shored each other up through many mundane, everyday struggles. We have also cheered for our members at plays and choir concerts, and through other successes large and small. When you create a mother-daughter book club, you create the opportunity to build your own community that will see you through life’s ups and downs over the years.

Being Able to Talk About Tough Issues Brought Up in Books

“I’m in two mother-daughter book clubs with my two daughters, and I just finished reading *Nineteen Minutes* by Jodi Picoult for my youngest daughter’s book club. I would

have never read this book on my own, and when I first picked it up, I was groaning and whining about it. It is a story about people in high school and a high school shooter. As I read, though, I realized what a great discussion we would have with our sophomore daughters about the characters and issues the book brings up, like bullying, peer pressure, and isolation. This is what it is really about, isn't it? Having the venue to discuss really hard issues with your daughter." —Jayne Mitchell

Girls may want more information about issues that worry them, but they don't know how to ask their moms the questions. Body changes, friends who say they don't like you anymore, pressure to have sex or drink alcohol . . . all these concerns may be on a girl's mind. Talking about these experiences as they happen to characters in a book is a safe way to broach the subjects that you may both be reluctant to tackle head-on.

Moms and daughters also both benefit from hearing what the other generation has to say about these issues. Even if you discuss them at home, family dynamics may prevent you from truly listening to what the other has to say. Mother-daughter book club can provide a neutral environment that encourages you to really hear each other, especially if other moms and girls in the group express similar opinions.

The Overriding Benefit—Having a Lot of Fun

Over and over again, when moms are asked why they are in a mother-daughter book club, they mention how much fun it is, in addition to all the other benefits they realize. Even though you can expect many rewards, having fun at your meetings is what will keep making book club more of a treat than a chore, and will keep making you return month after month, year after year. In some ways, that makes this the most important benefit of all.

Create Your Club with These Benefits in Mind

The chapters that follow talk about how to create your club, how to schedule enriching activities, and how to meet challenges that are sure to pop up along the way. You will hear from other moms who have successfully started clubs and kept them going, as well as parenting experts, authors, and others with advice to share. As you read, you will find even more evidence to support the major benefits outlined here, and you will surely come across a few more fringe benefits as well.

Keep in mind all the advantages you want to achieve as you create a club that will

work best for you and your daughter.

Sidebar

Reading Aloud to Your Daughter

When Madeleine and Catherine were babies, I loved holding their warm, snuggly bodies against me as I read picture books over and over to them. As they got older, I worried that some of the closeness we felt when we read together would disappear when they started to read on their own. Then I realized I didn't have to stop reading books to them just because they were capable of stringing words together without me. So we continued to snuggle up on the couch after school or in bed before the lights went out, and we had fun talking about the characters or situations in the books we chose.

As it turns out, there are also practical reasons for continuing to read to your daughter as she grows. Joanne Meier provides research guidance for Reading Rockets, an educational initiative that aims to inform and inspire parents and others on how to teach kids to read. She says that reading aloud "is a great opportunity to model for your child what good, fluent reading sounds like." She also advises that the best read-aloud books are a bit above the child's reading level.

"If they haven't achieved that level of fluency yet, it can be motivating and exciting for them. It really brings the book to life, and kids will sit rapt, chapter after chapter, because you are telling a story in a way they can't," Meier says.

How can you make sure your daughter will want you to continue reading aloud to her as she grows? Here are a few tips for making read-aloud time a great mother-daughter activity:

- Read with expression, and get into creating voices for the characters. You can even try on accents. If you read with a monotone voice, it will be easy for your daughter to tune out what you are saying and want to stop.
- Modulate your voice to go with the action. Slow down when something scary is about to happen, and speed up when the pace picks up.
- Pause when you want to talk about something. You can stop to laugh during a funny scene, or when you want to explain a situation your daughter may not be familiar with. You can even stop to cry if you are reading a particularly sad scene. Reacting to what you read gives the story meaning.
- Make reading time special. Cover up with a quilt or sip hot cocoa while you turn

the pages together.

- Choose a good downtime, like when your daughter is having an after-school snack before she starts homework, or before bedtime. This way, you won't both be distracted by other activities.
- Don't make it a requirement. If you tell your daughter she has to sit with you and read for twenty minutes whether she wants to or not, it can set up a power struggle between the two of you. Reading together should be a welcome break you both look forward to, not a chore.