

Engagement Cues Cheat Sheet

Read Your Child's Signals & Pivot Quickly

■ PURPOSE

- Recognize when your child is **engaged** (keep going!)
- Spot **disengagement** quickly (time to pivot!)
- Know exactly what to do when attention fades
- Make reading time **responsive**, not rigid

✓ ENGAGEMENT SIGNS: Keep Going!

Physical Cues

- ✓ Leaning in toward the book or you
- ✓ Eyes on the page or pictures
- ✓ Still body / relaxed posture
- ✓ Pointing at pictures or words
- ✓ Turning pages eagerly

Verbal Cues

- ✓ Asking questions or making predictions
- ✓ Making connections to real life
- ✓ Commenting on the story
- ✓ Asking to continue reading
- ✓ Talking about characters as if real

Emotional Cues

- ✓ Laughing, gasping, or looking worried
- ✓ Smiling throughout
- ✓ Expressing feelings about characters
- ✓ Getting excited about plot

When you see these:

- ✓ This book is working!
- ✓ Keep going — don't interrupt!
- ✓ Note what made this book work
- ✓ Find more books like this one

✗ DISENGAGEMENT SIGNS: Time to Pivot!

Physical Cues

- ✗ Looking away frequently
- ✗ Fidgeting or squirming constantly
- ✗ Yawning repeatedly
- ✗ Body turned away from book
- ✗ Eyes glazed over

Verbal Cues

- ✗ "Are we done yet?" / "How many pages left?"
- ✗ One-word answers or no response
- ✗ Changing the subject
- ✗ Asking to do something else

Emotional Cues

- ✗ Sighing or whining
- ✗ Irritability or crankiness
- ✗ Sudden need for bathroom / water
- ✗ "This is boring."

When you see these:

- ✗ This book isn't working right now
- ✗ Don't push through — it won't help!
- ✗ Try a PIVOT immediately (see below)
- ✗ Ending badly damages reading joy

■ THE PIVOT MENU — When engagement drops, choose ONE:

PIVOT #1: The Voice Change**What to do:**

- Add silly character voices
- Whisper dramatically during tense parts
- Use different accents / make sound effects
- Sing instead of read

When it works:

- Book content is good but delivery needs energy
- Child is tired but still interested

Example: Child's eyes wander during dialogue. Parent adds a squeaky voice for the mouse. Child laughs and re-engages.

PIVOT #2: The Skip Ahead**What to do:**

- "Want to skip to the exciting part?"
- "Let's jump ahead to see what happens!"
- Flip through and read the "best parts"

When it works:

- Book is too slow-paced
- Child needs momentum — setup is dragging

Example: Child fidgeting during long description. Parent says "Let's skip to when the adventure starts!" Child re-engages.

PIVOT #3: The Physical Shift**What to do:**

- Stand up and act out scenes together
- Use stuffed animals / toys as characters
- Draw what's happening in the story
- Read outside or while child bounces / swings

When it works:

- Child needs movement, not more sitting
- Energy is high but focus is low

Example: Child can't sit still. Parent says "You be the detective, I'll be the suspect!" Read while moving.

PIVOT #4: The Honest Check-In**What to do:**

- "This book isn't grabbing you, is it?"
- "Want to try a different book?"
- Offer a choice: [option A] or [option B]?

When it works:

- Book is genuinely the wrong match
- You've tried other pivots and nothing's working

Example: Parent says "You know what? This book isn't working for us. Let's try something else." Child picks a new book.

PIVOT #5: Shorten & End on Success**What to do:**

- "Let's read just one more page and stop there."
- Switch to a short, easy favourite as a "dessert" book
- Always end before frustration peaks

When it works:

- Child is genuinely tired or emotionally maxed out
- Late in the evening / end of reading session

Example: Child getting irritable. Parent says "You worked so hard! Let's end with [favourite easy book] as our dessert."

■ QUICK DECISION FLOWCHART

Is your child showing 3+ disengagement cues?	If NO → keep reading and stay observant
↓ YES: Have you been reading for 15+ minutes?	→ YES: PIVOT #5: Shorten & end on success
↓ NO: Is the content good but delivery boring?	→ YES: PIVOT #1: Voice change, energy boost
↓ NO: Is the pacing too slow?	→ YES: PIVOT #2: Skip ahead to exciting parts
↓ NO: Does child need to move?	→ YES: PIVOT #3: Physical shift — act it out
↓ NO: Is the book just not the right match?	→ YES: PIVOT #4: Honest check-in, switch books

■ IMPORTANT REMINDERS

DON'T say:

✗ "You never pay attention when I read!"

✗ "Why can't you just sit still?"

✗ "I picked this book especially for you!"

DO say:

✓ "This book isn't working right now. Let's try something else."

✓ "Your body needs to move. Let's read while we walk!"

✓ "I can tell you're not into this one. Want to pick a different book?"

The 3-Cue Rule:	If you notice 3+ disengagement cues, pivot immediately. Don't wait — the longer you push, the harder it is to recover.
Engagement Varies by Time:	Morning/after school = often lower. Before bed = often best. Match reading time to your child's natural rhythms.
Some Days Are Just Hard:	Tired, hungry, stressed, overstimulated — pivot to easier/shorter reading, or skip and try tomorrow. One skipped day won't ruin reading.
Disengagement = Information:	Not defiance, not failure. It's your child's body communicating. Stay curious, not frustrated.

■ ENGAGEMENT LOG (Optional — track patterns over time)

Date	Book Title	Engagement (1–5)	Cues Noticed	Pivots Used	Outcome

After 1 week, look for patterns: best time of day, book types that work, which pivots help most.

You're learning to READ YOUR CHILD, not just read to them.

Every time you notice a cue early, pivot before frustration builds, end on a positive note, and match books to engagement patterns — you're building a positive reading relationship, trust, intrinsic motivation, and joy around books.

Keep watching. Keep pivoting. Keep being responsive. You're doing this beautifully. ■