

8 Simple Tips To Help Your Child Read

By Linda Ogier of Fox Copy

Take away the skill of reading and not only books become a mysterious and foreign world, but reading train timetables, ordering from a menu, understanding bank statements, and any number of straightforward daily activities become virtually impossible.

If your child is struggling to read, the effects of their problem can reach into adulthood, be humiliating, and extremely limiting.

The world of a non reader is a mixed up place where only those who know the 'secret code' can decipher the strange symbols around them and fully participate.

A sad, lonely, and stressful place indeed.

The time to catch your child's reading problems and support them in their quest to become a confident and capable life long reader is Primary School. Preferably before they reach Grade 3.

Your school will be monitoring your child's progress and implementing a detailed plan to improve their reading skills and strategies. But, if you're worried that the school is not, then an appointment with the teacher is a must to thoroughly explore your concerns and issues.

Do not put this off!

After Grade 3 it is more difficult for children to bridge the gap, learn new patterns of reading behaviour, and develop appropriate reading strategies.

Encouraging them while they're young is vital, and there are some things you can do at home to complement and support your school's efforts.

Here are 8 simple ways to help your child if reading is a struggle for them:

1. Make your reading time a regular activity at a specific time each day. Children love structure and will look forward to the closeness and bonding this time brings.

For some children this may be the only intimate one-on-one time they get to spend with a parent on a regular basis. Making reading together a special time for just the two of you only takes 10 or 15 minutes a day, and the rewards are tremendous.

2. Vary how you structure your reading time together. Don't always expect your child to read to you. Read to them sometimes. Take turns reading. Read out loud together! Make sure it's a **stress free** and enjoyable time together.

3. Use the 3 P's. Pause, prompt, praise.

Pause when your child comes to a word they don't know. Don't jump in straight away by telling them the word or getting them to sound it out. Let them think.

Prompt your child if they haven't answered after about 10 - 20 seconds. Say 'Make your mouth say the first sound', or 'What word would make sense there?', or 'Can you tell me what would sound right there?'. Only sound out the word if it *can* be effectively sounded out.

If your child doesn't get the word after a couple of prompts or an attempt at sounding out, tell them the word straight away. You want to avoid feelings of failure, plus make sure they get on with the book while they can still remember what the story is about.

Praise your child for their efforts. Say something like 'Well done, you made it look and sound right', or 'Well done, you used the first sound to help you figure out the rest of the word'. If they didn't get the word, simply praise them for trying their best... 'That was a great try - well done'. Be as specific as possible.

4. Not every single word has to be right. Refrain from picking on every last error unless you want to make your child feel inadequate and fearful of making too many mistakes. This will contribute to their negative attitude towards reading and make their progress even slower.

If your child is gaining the overall meaning from the story or text, then they are achieving the major goal of reading - to decipher words and receive a message.

5. Talk, talk, talk.... Ask your child to retell their favourite part of the book in their own words. Talk about what they would do if they were a person from the book. Talk about the way the characters in the book felt and why they felt like that. Talk about interesting words from the book and what they mean. This will help increase your child's level of comprehension.

6. Be seen to be a reader. It's surprising how many kids never see their own parents reading a book. A newspaper yes - but not a book! Kids are the greatest mimics in the world, and they especially love to copy their mum or dad.

Sit down and read your own separate books at the same time. Share parts of your books with one another by reading them out loud and telling why you chose that part. Make it obvious that reading is something you personally value and think is worthwhile.

7. Don't cover up the pictures! Never. Ever. Using pictures is one of the ways children gather information to support their use of sound, letter, and word skills. Pictures support the meaning of a story and provide a context to help children solve unknown words.

Picture story books have pictures for a reason. Many times the text doesn't make sense without the pictures, and asking your child to read it without looking at the pictures will often feel like trickery to them.

8. Last but definitely not least - make reading fun! The last thing it needs to be is a chore. You can't blame any child for being unwilling if something is hard AND a bore.

Find books about topics your child is interested in. Read craft books and make things. Get out a cookbook and follow a recipe. Get out the words to favourite songs and follow along. Create a treasure hunt with lots of clues to read.... anything that makes reading something to look forward to.

Make your reading time together regular, interesting, stress free, and fun. Your child will benefit, and so might you!

Happy reading!

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