



How to help with reading : A guide for parents

Be positive! Praise your children for trying hard. Let them know that it's all right to make a mistake.

Give them time. Let them develop their skills by encouraging them to look closely at the letters in unfamiliar words and break them into chunks of sound so that they can pronounce them. This is better for their development as readers than guessing or always waiting for you to supply the word.

Do discuss any words that your child stumbles over. Practise looking at and saying the word until they are fluent and check that they know the meaning.

Encourage them to use the new words they find. It is only by using new words that they will become part of your child's vocabulary.

Do ask them for meanings of words that you think they already know. You might be surprised at how difficult they find it to define even quite common words or what misconceptions they have about meanings. Dictionaries might have to be resorted to!

Let them read their favourite books. Don't worry if they only read one kind of book. If they are really stuck, ask the librarian or teacher to suggest something.

Make sure that they are reading books at an appropriate level. The five finger test should help with this. There should only be one or two words on a page that are unfamiliar to your child. Any more than this and the book is too hard and hard books do not make better readers. Save it for when they are older. As their skills develop they will get much more from it.

Make the story come to life. Encourage your child to read with expression. Make sure that they are pausing appropriately at full stops and commas.

Ask lots of questions about the story. Why does the character say that? Does this book remind you of anything that has happened to you? Can you guess what will happen next? What would you have done if you were....?

Cosy down! Make sure that when you hear your children read aloud you are sitting side by side and looking at the text with them. That way you can monitor their accuracy. Are they misreading little words such as, *to*, *and*, *the*? Are they putting words in that aren't there? You will not be able to tell if you are listening to them in the car or while you are preparing supper!

Even when you think your child is a confident, independent reader, do make sure that you check they are absorbing what they read alone. Spot check meanings of words on the pages they have read to themselves. Ask about the plot. It is very easy for a child to get into the habit of skim reading books and this causes problems later on when their reading comprehension needs to be very accurate.

A child is never too old to be read to. There is real pleasure in being tucked up in bed and hearing a story read aloud, so don't abandon the bedtime story too soon. Story tapes can always provide a substitute if time is short.