

A guide to helping your child to read...

How should I read to my child?

- As you read to your child, **bring the characters to life** – talk about the characters, the drawings and the events so that the story starts to come alive.
- Don't be afraid to **try different voices** or try out your acting skills. While you may not win an Oscar, your child will enjoy your performance and appreciate the story even more.
- **Remember that your face says it all** – so exaggerate your normal expression times three like a children's TV presenter: children will love it.
- **Emphasise repeated words and phrases** ('the big bad wolf'; '... blew, and blew, and blew the house down'). In this way, your child starts to learn the language used in books. Encourage your child to say the words with you.
- **Turn off the television** and concentrate on enjoying the book.
- **Try audio books** that children can listen to on the car stereo, on computers or phones – this is a great way to build a child's understanding of stories and improve their listening.

How often should I read to my child, and how long for?

- **Be guided by how long they will listen.** For younger children this may be quite short periods of time, while slightly older children may be readier to listen for longer.
- As for how often, there's no right answer, but many experts suggest a routine helps. For **school-age children**, **a bedtime story** can be a nice way for you to spend a small amount of time together and wind down after a busy day. For **pre-school children**, **shorter bursts of reading** throughout the day may be a good idea but, again, be guided by how long your child will listen.

Choosing what to read

When it comes to instilling a love of reading, it doesn't really matter what you read. The important thing is that we all help to inspire our children to feel confident and comfortable reading.

Ask yourself what type of reading the book is for. Is it a book they have got from school to help practise reading and build fluency? Is it a book that they find easy to read that helps them build confidence? Is it a book for you to read for pleasure to your child?

How can I choose books at the right level for my child?

As a rule of thumb, you would expect a child to read a book with about 95% accuracy if they want to read it to themselves. Less than that, and it's likely that they're missing out, or misreading too many words for them to make sense of the story.

Introduce the 'Rule of five' to older children. Encourage them to read the first page or two of a new book. They must put up one finger for every word they cannot read. If they get to five fingers, then the book is too hard for them and they should choose another one. Don't encourage them just to guess at words they can't read.

Top 10 tips to help children enjoy reading

To help make reading enjoyable and fun, we asked experts and authors what they recommend to help get kids reading.

1. **Make books part of your family life** – Always have books around so that you and your children are ready to read whenever there's a chance.
2. **Join your local library** – Get your child a library card. You'll find the latest videogames, blu-rays and DVDs, plus tons and tons of fantastic books. Allow them to pick their own books, encouraging their own interests.
3. **Match their interests** – Help them find the right book - it doesn't matter if it's fiction, poetry, comic books or non-fiction.
4. **All reading is good** – Don't discount non-fiction, comics, graphic novels, magazines and leaflets. Reading is reading and it is all good.
5. **Get comfortable!** – Snuggle up somewhere warm and cosy with your child, either in bed, on a beanbag or on the sofa, or make sure they have somewhere comfy when reading alone.
6. **Ask questions** – To keep them interested in the story, ask your child questions as you read such as, 'What do you think will happen next?' or 'Where did we get to last night? Can you remember what had happened already?'
7. **Read whenever you get the chance** – Bring along a book or magazine for anytime your child has to wait, such as at a doctor's surgery.
8. **Read again and again** – Encourage your child to re-read favourite books and poems. Re-reading helps to build up fluency and confidence.
9. **Bedtime stories** – Regularly read with your child or children at bedtime. It's a great way to end the day and to spend valuable time with your child.
10. **Rhyme and repetition** – Books and poems which include rhyme and repetition are great for encouraging your child or children to join in and remember the words.

Understanding phonics

My child has just started school and is learning to read via phonics. What is phonics?

With phonics, children are taught to read by learning the phonemes (sounds) that represent letters or groups of graphemes (letters).

With this knowledge, children can begin to read words by learning how to blend the sounds together. Unlocking how this alphabetic code works means they can learn to decode any word. For example, when taught the sounds /t/, /p/, /a/, /i/ and /s/ early on, children can read words such as it, is, tap, tip, pat, sip and sat by blending the individual sounds together to make the whole word.

These words can also be broken down (segmented) into their phonemes for spelling. For example, the word 'sat' has three phonemes, /s/, /a/ and /t/ which the children learn to write with the three graphemes (letters) 's', 'a' and 't' that they have been taught.

They will also be taught to read words – such as 'once', 'was' or 'have' – which don't follow the phonic 'rules'. They'll build up a stock of these tricky words that they can recognize straight away.

Top tips on phonics

Say the sounds correctly

It's important that the sounds are pronounced correctly, as they would sound in speech. Try not to add 'uh' to consonant sounds, such as /t/ and /p/, as this makes it trickier to blend the sounds together into words.

Link sounds and letters to make words

Children are taught in school to quickly see a link between the phoneme (sounds) and a written representation of that sound (grapheme). At home, encourage your child to do the same when playing with fridge magnets in the kitchen, for example, or 'writing' when you are writing.

Don't be scared – make it fun!

Phonics can seem daunting for parents who were probably taught to read in a rather different way. However, simple games such as 'I spy' are great for helping reading, because the children have to listen to sounds. Say, "I spy, with my little eye, something that begins with (for example) the sound 'f-f-f'" Look at the 'football' or the 'fridge'. Make sure you refer to the first sound (not the first letter). Take it in turns, with your child saying, "I spy..." Make it lots of fun.

Practise!

Encourage your child to use their phonic knowledge when they are practising their reading. Make sure that they look at each letter in turn, all through each word. Encourage them to work out the sounds and then blend them together to make the whole word. Praise them for trying to use all the letters rather than guessing from just the first letter or the picture.

What if children just don't enjoy reading?

If you think your child is having problems reading, the first step is always to speak to your child's teacher and share your concerns. Many children learn at different rates, and you shouldn't get anxious.

Remember that anxious children can't learn, and that early enjoyment of books and stories lasts for life.

What do I do if my child doesn't enjoy reading?

- Make sure your child isn't tired, hungry or desperate to watch their favourite TV programme when you read to them. Sit with them for a short time every day and read a book with them on a subject that interests them, whether that's cars, animals or sports. Don't expect them to read it for themselves. Just show them how interesting it is to be able to read so that they want to do it for themselves.
- For many children, especially boys as they get older, non-fiction books are more interesting than fiction, so it may be as simple as changing the type of books you are reading together. Talk to your teacher or a local children's librarian to see what books are available that match your child's interests.
- Give plenty of praise. Let your child know how pleased you are when he or she looks at a book. Show interest in what they have chosen. Children really do develop at their own rates when it comes to reading.

My son is switching off reading - what can I do?

Research shows that boys are less likely to enjoy reading than girls. More boys than girls struggle with reading and writing at school and boys are more likely to say they don't spend any time reading outside the classroom. But there are ways you can help:



- It's important to **make sure that you're reading something with your son which interests him**. Many boys like non-fiction books, so try asking at your local library for recommendations – it may be that he'll enjoy reading Horrible Histories or the Guinness Book of Records more than fiction.
- Role models are also important. **Makesure boys see their dads, uncles or granddads reading**, even if it's a newspaper, so that it seems familiar and they can copy their reading behaviour.
- Finally, **praise** your son when something is read well. Equally, if he reads something incorrectly, don't make him feel that this is bad - mistakes are just part of the learning process.

What should I do if my child is not at the reading level they're expected to be at?

- Don't panic and don't make your child stressed about reading. It may be the case that your child is young for their year group, or not developmentally ready for reading. Also, most children don't progress in a straight line as they learn to read: they may have periods of fast progress followed by periods of consolidation. Children who start off behind for any reason tend to take a little while to catch up.
- It can be very worrying if you think your child is falling behind. Make an appointment to discuss your concerns with your child's class teacher.

"Reading should be about having fun and adventure and magic, not just 'making progress'." **Michaela Morgan**

I think my child's problems are more serious – what should I do?

Always speak to your child's teacher and share your concerns again. Explain exactly what it is that is worrying you. Your child might have hearing problems, for example, that are getting in the way of learning to read and the school can arrange for tests to be done.

Here are links to organisations that deal with some other reading problems:

Dyslexia

www.bdadyslexia.org.uk

www.nhs.uk/conditions/dyslexia/pages/introduction.aspx www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk

Stammering

www.stammering.org/phonics.html

Speech and Language Therapists

www.rcslt.org

Further information

For advice on reading to your child:

www.pearsonschoolsandfecolleges.co.uk/Primary/GlobalPages/Reading-for-Pleasure/Reading-for-Pleasure.aspx www.wordsforlife.org.uk
www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/pedagogy/b00192950/encouraging-reading-for-pleasure (guide for teachers, but contains plenty of relevant advice)

Phonics support

www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/schools/phonics.aspx

Mumsnet & Literacy Trust

www.mumsnet.com/learning
www.literacytrust.org.uk

Where to find your local library – Directgov:

www.direct.gov.uk/en/HomeAndCommunity/YourlocalcouncilandCouncilTax/YourCommunity/DG_4018790

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www.booksellers.org.uk/bookshopsearch
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