

How a parent can help... ...with reading and spelling

By Chrissi Giessen-Hood

Educational Psychologist for Kindergarten and Primary School

Reading

Motivation: Make the work interesting and the discipline will take care of itself. Being too judgmental about what the child is reading (comics) will have a negative effect on motivation. Anything should be acceptable

Before starting to read:

- Choose a book that both of you will enjoy
- Choose stories with interesting characters & good dialogue
- Create a relaxed atmosphere
- First read the title & skim through the book quickly

While reading aloud

- Read slowly & clearly, but naturally
- Create a mood by changing the volume & pitch of your voice
- Use humor - laugh at funny passages
- Encourage questions & discussions
- Share personal thoughts about the pictures & story with each other
- Offer additional information & explain key concepts or new words but don't spoil the story

After reading aloud

- Ask the child a few questions about the story (not in a heavy-handed way)
- Encourage the child to ask questions about the story - model how to answer questions
- Let the child retell the story briefly
- Relate the story to real-life experiences of the child
- Share personal likes & dislikes, emotional reactions to story

How not to improve a child's reading level

- Make reading a chore that has to be done for a certain amount of time every day
- Tie your opinion of your child to his reading ability & communicate this through your attitudes & behaviour
- Push the child to read at higher level than he is comfortable with
- Bribe him to read

To help a child with his reading at home, parents need to know the main components of reading instruction

- Word attack skills: include phonics plus other approaches based on word structure (breaking words up into syllables) (if a parent wants to help a child she has to make sure that he/she follows the same approach as the teacher & uses words already dealt with)
- Sight words: which consist of those words the child knows instantly without having to use any word attack skills (NB for children who struggle with reading) (recommended that parents should not be

the first to teach new words to a child. Parent's task is to reinforce that work. Parents can select words from a reading lesson which has been done in class) (For children with LD it takes about 35-65 meaningful exposures to a new word before it becomes part of their long-term reading vocabulary)

- Comprehension or understanding what is being read, without which reading is a meaningless exercise

Basic problems that cause poor comprehension:

- Inadequate sight vocabulary - the child struggles so much with each word that meaning is lost
- Child uses a global approach to reading - guessing words. Children need help with word analysis
- Poor concentration (neurological/emotional). Boring material. Focus on child's interests
- Reading level may be too difficult for the child to follow the material (child should be able to read 95% of the words correctly on a page consisting of 10 words to a line & 10 lines to a page. If does not know the meaning of 5 words on the page the book is probably too hard for him to read fluently with understanding)
- A culturally deprived child may not understand the concepts and themes addressed in the reading material (child needs to have his world of experiences expanded by being read to, going on trips, watching informative videos, language enrichment courses etc)

Helping to read

- The parent can scan the story first & go over words that may be difficult for the child
- Child could be allowed to read through a story silently before reading is aloud
- Let the child read a favorite story on an audio device when no one is around
- The child could take turns reading parts of a story with someone else
- When a child reads, a parent could softly read with him, if the child struggles with a word, the parent immediately reads the word for him so that the flow and meaning is not lost. The child sets the pace
- A parent could read the first part of the story until the child's interest is hooked, after which he could read the rest himself
- Add variety: read one sentence & let him read the next one
- Keep interruptions at a minimum. Only correct mistakes that affect the meaning of the story. Don't go into phonics

Spelling

- Let the child look at the word for a few seconds. Remove the word & allow a pause of a few seconds before he is asked to spell it (forced delay helps to hold on to the stimulus & learn better. The child can be asked to walk to the door and back)
- Let the child write each word on a separate 3x5 card to help him focus on each one more intensively. Help him to organize all these cards in his spelling box.
- Introduce variety to make it more interesting & to determine which way he learns best (write in air before on paper, tracing after parent, wax crayon, glitter glue, saying word softly before writing down, use a computer, spell check)
- Let the child set his own goal as to how many words he wants to get right
- More than 10 minutes should not be spent on spelling. Boredom creates resistance & bad spelling.

You might also want to have a look at:

[How a parent can help with homework](#)

[How a parent can help with Mathematics](#)