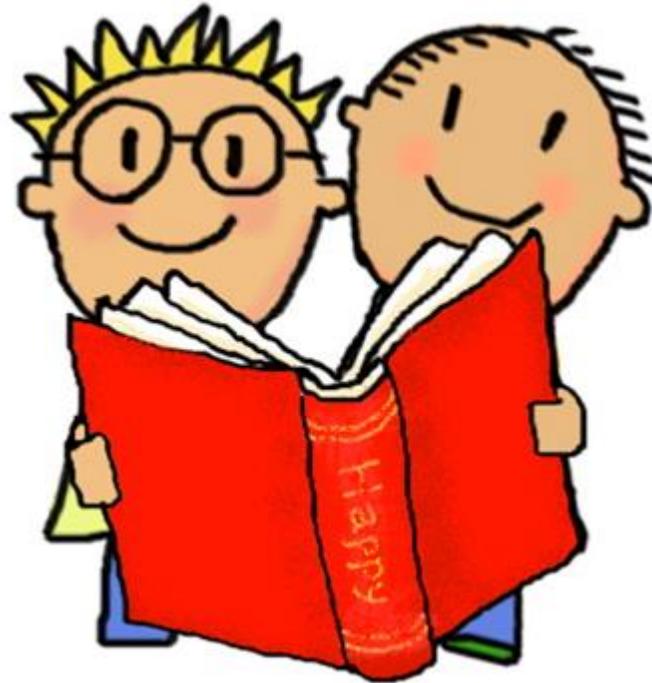


Helping your child with reading



Learning to read

Learning to read is a complex task and one of the most important things your child will learn at school.

Some children have already made a start with reading before they come to school; others make their first steps once they start school.

Some children find learning to read relatively easy, while for others the task seems more difficult. Sometimes a child is slow to get started, and then it all “clicks into place” and they are away! No two children are the same and we use a range of approaches to reflect this.

Just as you taught your child to talk by talking to them, so you can help them learn to read by reading with them. As well as contributing to their success with reading, you will also be sharing in the delight which books can bring. Our aim is to help children want to read as well as being able to read!

Cracking the Code !

As competent readers it is hard to imagine how young children first learn to make sense of the printed word. If we think of print as a set of symbols (like a secret code) then we can imagine the task facing the child in the early stages of reading. They have to learn:

- ❖ Each symbol stands for a particular sound.
- ❖ Some of these symbols are easy to remember (especially the one at the beginning of my name!).
- ❖ Sometimes these symbols go together to make a different sound (such as ch, ing).
- ❖ Some symbols look very similar (such as b and d).
- ❖ Symbols are put together in groups to form words.
- ❖ In between each word there is always a space; that is how you know that it is a new word.
- ❖ Sometimes you can spot repeated groups of symbols, and that means it is the same word repeated e.g. "Jack climbed **up** and **up**".
- ❖ Sometimes the groups of symbols are almost the same, and that can help me work out new words e.g. "I'll **huff** and I'll **puff** to blow your house down."
- ❖ When I have memorised what some of these words look like, it helps me figure out the sentence because some of it is already known.

The task facing the reader is to use all these clues to help them work out the meaning of the text.

The early stages of learning to read

Children are picking up important messages about reading and how it works long before they have begun to notice the detail in the words and letters. They will learn that:

- ❖ Books convey meaning.....maybe they will be telling a story, or perhaps they are telling you facts about something.
- ❖ The pictures help you understand what the text is about.
- ❖ You start at the front of the book and gradually work your way to the back.
- ❖ Page 1 comes before page 2.
- ❖ On each page the print runs from left to right.
- ❖ If there are several lines of text on a page, you go from left to right, then start a new line on the left, and gradually work your way down the page.
- ❖ Each word printed represents one word spoken (and this is sometimes made more complicated when the word has 2 syllables e.g. "button" is only 1 word, but it has 2 syllables).
- ❖ Once they have begun to make a start with reading they realise that they can use the meaning of the story (sometimes aided by the pictures) together with some of the visual information (such as the first letter of the word) and that these 2 clues together are an effective way of working out what the word could be.

Helping children in the early stages

Children can be encouraged to run their finger under the print, running from left to right.

Later on they can be shown how to point at the words one at a time.

They can be encouraged to spot repeated words, or words that start with the same letter.

They can be encouraged to guess what the next word might be, by looking at the picture.....this is a really important step, because it reinforces the idea that the text carries meaning, and the pictures help you figure out the meaning. Of course, as they become more proficient, reliance on the pictures becomes less important.

Talking about what is happening in the story (or about the facts that can be gleaned from a non-fiction book) is really important, as it ensures that the child is reading for meaning, not just decoding the symbols on the page.

At first children will be reading the text from memory, using their knowledge of the story to help them know what word is coming next. Gradually they will notice more detail in the print and will use a combination of attention to letters and words, use of pictures, and their understanding of the story to help them know what word is next. Over time, the focus on the detail in the words and letters will grow.

Phonics

At school we teach children about the sounds letters make so they can use this knowledge to help them work out unknown words. There are some important steps in learning phonics:

1. First of all children have to be able to **hear** the difference between the sounds e.g. "Which sounds different: dog, door, mouse, doughnut?" Children need to be able to hear and distinguish the different sounds before they can move on to making the link between the sounds and the letters that represent those sounds.
2. Then they have to learn the sounds represented by each of the symbols. We teach these a few at a time, gradually adding more. The first sounds the children learn are : s, a, t, p, i and n (because knowledge of these letters enables you to build quite a few short words e.g. at, as, in, it.)
3. Children learn to put sounds together to spell words, and to blend the sounds on a page to read a word. We start with 2 letter words such as in, as, it.
4. Next children move on to 3 letter words that have a vowel in the middle (consonant, vowel, consonant, or cvc words) such as dog, pig and hat.
5. Gradually they learn about the letters which can be grouped together, such as ay, er, ch and ee.
6. Once they have mastered cvc words they go on to work with ccvc words such as pram, trap and step.
7. Next they learn to build words with 2 consonants at the end, such as best, lend and lost.

There is a lot to learn!

Other important skills

Learning about the sounds letters make and how they can be put together is a really important aspect of learning to read. But phonics is just one of the skills that children use, and it is important that they continue to use meaning cues as well.

Good readers combine both visual cues (using letter knowledge or recognition of familiar words) and meaning cues e.g. reading "Tom stroked the puppy" may be aided by an appropriate picture (a meaning cue), but looking at the p in puppy will help the child know that the word wasn't dog (a visual cue).....he wouldn't need to "sound out" p-u-pp-y if he was using the meaning cue together with the visual cue. We are looking for an efficient method of "cracking the code" and combining cues is much more efficient than relying just on one.

Children clearly need to be able to recognise on sight those common words that crop up all the time, like was, there, here, some. They are taught to read these in school through work with flashcards, magnet letters and matching games. It can be helpful to point out a few words they have recently learnt within the text before they start reading.

We want children to see reading as a problem-solving activity, and to notice if their attempt doesn't sound right. They should go back and double-check if their attempt doesn't make sense

Becoming an independent reader

Here are some of the things that independent readers do:

- ❖ They search for meaning in the text..... they know it has to make sense.
- ❖ They check for themselves while they are reading.
- ❖ They sometimes repeat what they have read, just to double-check.
- ❖ They go back and try again if it doesn't seem right.
- ❖ They cross-check one kind of cue with another.....they don't just use phonic cues, for example, they combine phonic cues with meaning cues.
- ❖ They know it has to "look right" and "sound right".
- ❖ They notice if something is wrong and re-read the line, sentence or word to try to sort it out.
- ❖ They keep on trying until they have solved the problem.
- ❖ They read so it sounds right, using good phrasing.
- ❖ They use the punctuation, pausing at full stops and using an appropriate voice when they see speech marks.
- ❖ If the book is at the right level for their stage of development, the independent reader will be reading at 90% accuracy; this means that he will make about 1 error for every 10 words read. More errors than this means the book is too challenging and there is not enough "known" information in it for the child to use to help them work out the unknown bits.....try something easier!

How parents can help

- ❖ Read stories to your child regularly; bedtime is often a good time.
- ❖ Read yourself so your child sees reading as a valuable activity. Boys can be a little slower to get going with reading, so it is especially important for them to see Dad, Grandad or older brother reading, and for reading to be recognised as valuable and desirable for both boys and girls.
- ❖ Encourage your child to read with you every day, noting in their Home-school Diary what they did well.....nothing succeeds like success.
- ❖ Encourage your child to sit still and concentrate; cuddled up together with a book is very relaxing and concentrates the mind.
- ❖ Find a quiet time.....T.V. off!
- ❖ Talk about the story.
- ❖ Remember that information books and poetry books are just as valuable as story books.
- ❖ When your child makes a mistake, give them time to see if they spot it, and time to try to sort it out on their own. Of course, if they get really stuck, give them a hand.
- ❖ Tell them what they did well; be specific e.g. "I like the way you went back and tried that again; you knew it didn't sound right." See the Prompts page for ideas of specific things you could say.
- ❖ Remember that they need to use the meaning of the story as well as visual information from the letters, so encourage them to look at the pictures.

Prompts

Praising children for specific behaviour when they read is a powerful way of reinforcing good reading behaviour. Here are some ideas of some things you might say:

“ I like the way you looked at the picture to help you think what the word could be.”

“Well done for looking at the first letter to help you work it out.”

“It was clever to look at the end of the word as well as the beginning.” (e.g. to check if the word was **looked** or **looking**)

“I like the way you went back and tried it again to check it sounded right.”

“I can see you were checking it sounded right and looked right. That’s what good readers do.”

“ Well done for stopping at the full stops. ”

“I like the way you changed your voice when you got to the speech marks.”

“ Brilliant! You didn’t give up, you just kept trying till you were sure it was right.”