

How can you help your child with their reading?

* **Read with your child every day** but try to do so at a time when there are few other distractions and they are not too tired (a challenge after a long day at school!).

* **Always praise your child's efforts.** For a child to progress as a reader, he/she must feel confident and enjoy their reading. If your child makes a mistake, couch your comments in positive terms - eg 'Yes, you're right, that word does start with a 't', but have a look at the sounds after it.'

* **Don't think you can't tell your child difficult words.** If your child is struggling with a tricky word, it's fine to tell it to them. Use your common sense. If it's a word that you know he or she has come across before or could sound out or could guess from the pictures, encourage them to try to remember it, or to say the sounds, or to look at the picture for clues. If it's a real toughie, just tell them.

* **Help your child build up a vocabulary of sight words.** Phonic knowledge is vital, but the aim of learning to read is to eventually recognise words on sight, particularly irregular words. Keep to hand the list of the top 100 high-frequency words, and every now and again check that your child is slowly building up their sight vocabulary.

* **Don't jump in to correct mistakes too early.** This is very important, and surprisingly hard to do! Wait until the end of a phrase or sentence to see if your child realises they have made an error before drawing attention to it (positively! See above).

Errors are good! They are never random and tell you a lot about your child's favoured reading strategies. Do they rely heavily on pictures? Do they focus on context? Do they have a good understanding of grammatical structure? Do they realise that what they've read doesn't make sense? A fluent reader will be able to use all these strategies when appropriate.

For example, imagine your child is reading a page that has a picture of a boy eating a peach, accompanied by the sentence: 'The boy eats the peach.' The following different responses from your child can tell you a lot about their favoured reading strategies.

Child says: *"The boy eats the apple."*

It makes grammatical and contextual sense, and the peach could look like an apple in the picture. The child needs to be encouraged to pay more attention to the actual letters and sounds of unknown words.

Child says: *"The boy eats the peanut."*

It makes grammatical and contextual sense, and the child has paid some attention to the sounds. They need to be careful to sound out all the sounds in a word, and to use the picture for clues.

Child says: *"The boy eats the beach."*

The child seems to be focusing on the words and sounds quite accurately (reading 'b' for 'p' is a common and minor error), but isn't thinking about whether their reading makes sense. Encourage them to re-read the sentence and decide if it makes sense, and to look for clues in the picture.

Child says: *"The boy eat the peach."*

This is a very accurate reading apart from the grammatical error with 'eats'. Was this just careless or does the child frequently use the wrong person with verbs?

Note that an ability to re-read for sense is a vital skill for a child to develop when learning to read.

*** Talk about the book before and after reading.** Reading well is about far more than simply being able to decode words on a page. The best readers are able to recount stories accurately, make predictions about events or characters, draw inferences, relate texts to other stories they've read and to their own experiences. Therefore, discussion around a book is as important as actually reading it.

Before starting, ask your child to tell you what they see on its cover - "What do you think this book might be about?" "Why do you think that?". Is there a blurb on the back? Read it and discuss.

Ask questions as your child reads (though not so frequently as to disrupt their flow!) - "What do you think will happen next?"

After finishing, ask your child if they enjoyed the book and why - "What was your favourite part?" "Why do you think this character behaved in that way?" "What would you have done if it had happened to you?"

Try to make your questioning as varied as possible, ranging from simple retrieval of information ("Can you show me where the word 'astronaut' is?" "What was the dog's name?" "How many words can you find that rhyme with 'do'?") to more complex questions that require a deeper understanding or further thought ("Do you think the hen was clever or not?" "Did the boy do the right thing in keeping the money?").