

Helping your child to read, write and spell



A little reading goes a long way

Reading

Between the ages of four and seven years old, most children learn to read. Even when they can read, you should still try to read to them as often as possible. Sharing stories with a grown-up will teach them new words and encourage them to become better readers.

Children develop their reading skills in different ways. Some may want to get every word exactly right while other children will race to the end of a story. Other children may read hesitantly. Try to respond to your child's needs and let them read at their own pace.

If they get stuck, encourage them to use all the available information and everything they know to make a guess. They should look at the pictures and remember what has happened in the story. Their ability to predict and guess accurately will gradually improve.

You can also help by doing the following:

- Make the most of books your child brings home from school. Read them, or parts of them, yourself and talk about them with your child.
- Check your child is really following what they're reading by asking them to tell you the story in their own words - who's it about? What happens?
- Allow your child to re-read favourite and familiar stories, or to hear you re-read them. Knowing a familiar book will help them notice more about the words on the page and they will start to recognise the patterns in new words and stories.
- Listen to stories learned by heart and encourage your child to re-tell them in their own words, or even act them out. Encourage this.
- Buy books as presents instead of toys.
- Set up a special place for books from the library or their own books.

Some more ideas to help your child to read when you haven't got a book.

- **At breakfast time**
Look at the words on cereal packets, milk and fruit juice cartons. Get them to see how many words they can make out of the letters.
- **Going to the shops**
Some shops still have a sign over the door that says what they sell. Can your child put the words together with what's in the window (hairdressers, shoes, and so on)?
- **Look in the papers**
If your child recognises a famous face (e.g. a footballer or a TV star) it will make them want to try to read the story.
- **In the streets**
You'll see advertising posters and place names.
- **In the shops**
Your child can help you find things in the supermarket by reading out what's in the aisles.
- **Videos/DVDs**
Video/DVD boxes usually tell you the story. Get your child to read what's on the box as well as just watching the film.
- **On a bus or train trip**
Place names on the front of the bus or train, posters on the bus or tube. Even the ticket is worth reading to a child.
- **Look at holiday brochures together**
Help your child read about other places.
- **Unpacking the shopping**
Your child can read the words on your groceries while helping you put things away.
- **Some CDs and tapes have song words printed on them**
Your child will probably find it easier to follow words if they hear them at the same time.

You can help by doing the following:

- Whenever you're reading together, make sure your child feels OK and is comfortable.
- Use books with pictures, and later, with pictures and words. Picture books help children match the pictures to the words. Don't cover up the pictures to make your child 'read properly'.
- Write titles under pictures to show them that words belong to things. You can also stick labels on things at home or when they're older get them to do it themselves. Start with simple words

Beginning reading at school

When your child begins school, they will usually begin reading by bringing home a book without words. This is the first stage of the reading scheme. The books aim to develop your child's ability to gather information from pictures and tell stories. This is a vital stage as it sets the foundations for reading. As you look at the book with your child, encourage them to say what they see and describe what is happening on each page, gradually, your child will look deeper at the pictures and be able to give you more information from them. You can aid the story telling process by asking questions, for example:

- What is happening?
- How do you think this person is feeling?
- What do you think will happen next?
- Can you think of a name for this character?
- If you were in the story, who would you be? Why?
- How do you think the story will end?
- Was it a happy / sad / funny / scary story?

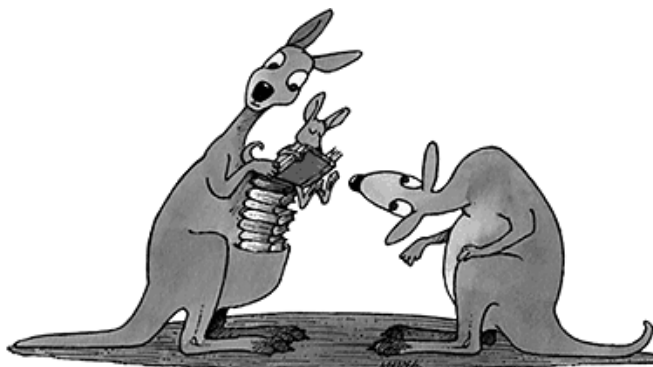
Encourage your child to turn the pages for themselves to become familiar with the way books work and point at the characters as they name them to introduce the idea that we can label things.

In school, your child will be learning phonics (sounds), which will support the reading process. Once your child knows enough basic sight words and sounds they will be given books that have simple words that

they can blend from the sounds plus some familiar or sight words. The pictures in these books are as important as those in the wordless books and your child can still be telling the story from them. Once they have told you about the pictures, invite them to tell you some of the sounds on the page, if they can confidently do this, ask them to say all of the sounds in one word, show them that by saying the sounds very closely together, they blend to make a word. Say the sounds with your child and demonstrate how to blend them together. Ask your child what word they can hear you / themselves saying and encourage them to point at each word as they say it. Do not worry if your child cannot hear the word from the sounds yet or does not know all of the sounds on the page; tell them the ones they are unsure of and praise them for their reading.

Your child will recognise some familiar words on the page so encourage them to look out for them as you read together.

Remember; reading is a process that every child goes through at their own pace and encouraging them to move on more quickly than they are ready for may make them feel frustrated or unable and will discourage their efforts. Praise your child and focus on what they **can** do, not what they cannot.



Learning to write and spell

Writing

Children are often eager to write. Writing often follows on from drawing and from the child's reading. Children like to be able to write their names, to label drawings or to write a story to go with a picture. They learn about reading through their writing, having to think about the sound and how words look. When they see that writing is a way of telling someone something, just like talking, they usually want to try it for themselves.

You can help them by doing the following:

- Get young children used to making the shapes of letters by joining dots or using a pen to go over shapes you've drawn in pencil.
- At the beginning, don't worry too much about untidy writing. You don't want to put them off having fun when they're learning.
- Don't worry if your child crosses words out when they're writing. Lots of children try out different spellings until they feel a word looks right. Get them to try out words on scrap paper, then put the word in its proper place when they are happy with it.
- Write a story that your child has told you. They can learn from watching you write and can help by suggesting letters and spellings.
- Help them to make their own labels, notices, cards and books.
- If they want to write a story, help them to think of what its about, what happens and how it ends. Ask questions about the characters in the story. You (or they) could write down some notes to help them remember all their ideas.
- Explain that they need different words to write about the past (we walked to the shops yesterday), present (today I am here) and future (tomorrow I will go swimming).
- Use lower case rather than capitals. Children find it easier to practise the patterns of the letters that way.

Spelling

Lots of children find spelling hard. If it gets in the way of your child's enjoyment of reading and writing, there are ways you can help using everyday items.

You can help them by doing the following:

- Spell out words with fridge magnets or letter tiles from word games. Take some letters out and get your child to put the right ones back in the right places.
- Play games with lists of words. Can they put them in alphabetical order using the first letter of a word (e.g. cat, fat, hat, mat and sat)? Or can they do this by the second letter (e.g. bag, beg, big, bog and bug)?
- Give them old newspapers or magazines to play word-finding games for example, get them to highlight or draw a circle round every word that ends with ing, or every word beginning with t. Think up harder versions as your child learns more.
- Draw or cut out pictures of things that have only one letter different (like pen and pin) to help them get used to how different vowels (a,e,i,o,u) work.
- Use a mirror so your child can see how their mouth moves when saying letters that can easily get mixed up when they write them down, like m and w, or p and g.
- Make up games to help your child see the difference between words like tap and tape or hop and hope where the last letter changes the way you say the whole word.
- Get them to play at rearranging letters to make other words (anagrams) out of their name, or other words they know.

