



Help your children to learn

**A GUIDE TO SUPPORTING READING FOR
PARENTS OF PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN**

department for
education and skills

Resources for
parents by parents

Research shows that your interest and involvement in your child's learning and education is more important than anything else in helping your child fulfil their potential. As parents, you are the people who go with your child on their learning journey, from the day they are born to the time they become an adult.

You, as the parent, carer or guardian know your child best. These leaflets give ideas and suggestions for you to choose from – you will know which ones suit you, your child and the school. All of the ideas in the leaflet have been developed by parents and can be used with, or adapted for, both primary and secondary age children and young people.

There are many sorts of schools in England – the ideas and suggestions made in these leaflets do not necessarily reflect DfES policy or school policy and should be viewed simply as support for parents in helping their children to learn. Your school may not have seen this leaflet before and it may be helpful to tell them that you are going to use it. All schools have a home school agreement and by signing this agreement you will be acknowledging your partnership with the school to help educate your child. Working in partnership with the school will help your child become a successful learner and a rounded person.



How to use this guide

As a parent you are the person who knows your child best, so you are ideally placed to help them with reading. This guide is written to give you ideas for helping with reading and to answer questions you may have about reading and learning to read. You can pick the ideas and suggestions which will work best for your family. All the ideas in this guide have been tried and tested by other parents. To make it easy for you to find the information you need, each section of the guide has been divided into three colour-coded parts.

Part 1 (blue) is called 'Instant ideas'. These are quick activities that you can do together with your child, daily or a few times a week, and which will make a real difference to your child's reading.

Part 2 (green) is called 'Try making time to' and gives you suggestions for longer activities that you could do together to build on the good work you are already doing.

Part 3 (red) is called 'What should I know?' and gives you the information you need to know about the stage of reading your child is at. For example, if your child is just learning to read, it explains that children often learn books off by heart before they learn to read.

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Frequently asked questions

What do I need to know about the National Literacy Strategy and the literacy hour?

I am really busy and don't have time to read with my child. What can I do?

My son doesn't like reading. What can I do?

My child has problems with reading. How do I help?

I have/my partner has problems with reading. Can I still help my child?

My child is not getting enough support at school to help them with reading. What can I do?

My child is not being challenged enough to improve their reading at school. What should I do?

My child keeps reading the same books over and over again. Is this normal?

I think my child is dyslexic. What should I do?

What sort of books should I choose for my child?

You will find the answers to these questions at the end of the booklet.

Help with reading is everywhere

Everywhere you go there are things to read – whether you are shopping, waiting for a bus, visiting a museum or sitting at the doctors. There are lots of fun ways to improve reading without children even realising they are learning! By pointing out words all around you, you will be making them aware of how important reading and literacy are. Reading in any language will help your child do well at school.

“My son and I spend time together talking about stuff we have read; it means we get to talk about what we like and don't like, and I get to know what makes him tick.”

Dad, Scunthorpe



Why do I need to help my child with their reading?

Even though schools teach children how to read, parents still have an important role to play. Research shows that parents who get involved in their child's education make a big difference to how well their children do. Parents can help their child with reading by showing how important it is and by finding ways to help their children enjoy reading. Studies show that children who enjoy reading do much better at school. Another recent study also found that children who were reading to their parents improved their reading skills a great deal, even if the parents could not read English or read at all in any language.

Instant ideas for improving a child's reading at any age – suggestions from parents

- Spend 10 minutes a day reading together. Make it fun – choose books you both enjoy. Talk about the pictures and characters and make up your own stories.
- Ask your child's teacher for advice and ideas about how you can help with reading.
- Buy books as presents.

- Make a special place to keep reading books from school, books borrowed from the library and books bought as presents. It will show how important reading is to you.
- Look at brochures and catalogues together.
- Look at newspapers together and point out more unusual words.
- Make a word box and put in new words your child has learnt.
- Let your child see you reading and talk about what you like and don't like reading.

"I love Stephen King books and my son really wants to read them too – so I have taken him to the library to get some *Goosebumps* books. When he's older we can share books."

Mum, Scunthorpe

"It is important to me that my kids have the chances I didn't. We read books together a few times a week as I want them to get a good education."

Mum, Scunthorpe

Learning to read

There are lots of simple things you can do to help your child get the best start to their education and to support what they are learning at pre-school or in reception.

Instant ideas:

- Get your child to spot letters they recognise (such as the first letter of their name) in words.
- Encourage your child to read the words on food packets when you are unpacking shopping or cooking.
- Spend 10 minutes a day reading a book together or talking about the pictures and making up your own story. Books are a great way to pass time on the bus or while you are waiting to see the doctor. Reading in any language helps children with their literacy.
- Sing nursery rhymes and songs together.
- Put books in your child's toy box.

Try making time to:

- Create a collage of the alphabet together by cutting up old newspapers and magazines.
- Label familiar objects around the house with post-it notes or signs.
- Have a longer reading session together. Get your child to choose a selection of their favourite books. You could use a story tape.
- Create 'My Book about Everything' with your child. It will get bigger as they do. Include photographs of the family, 'colour' pages on which you stick things of one colour cut out of magazines, your child's drawings and so on.

What should I know?

Children often learn stories off by heart so that they seem to 'read' a book. This is normal and means your child is well on the way to becoming a reader. It shows they understand the connection between the words in print and the story.

If you or your partner are not confident readers you can still help your child by talking about the pictures and making up a story to go with them. If you don't like reading out loud, story tapes can do the job for you. You can borrow story tape and book packs from the library.

Children will often want to read the same book over and over again. This shows that they are enjoying the book and getting real pleasure from reading. If it is driving you mad, you could read the favourite book and then read one of *your* favourites too.

“My daughter gets really excited when she recognises the letters she knows on signs and notices when we are out. Now we make it a game to see how many she can spot.”

Mum, Runcorn



Learning at home

Learning at home can be fun and will make a real difference to how well your child will do at school. Here you will find some suggestions to support learning at home.

Instant ideas:

- Spend 10 minutes reading together. Get your child to retell a favourite picture book in their own words.
- Get your children to make up plays. When a friend comes round they could put on a show for you. They could write the scenes themselves or use books to help them with ideas.
- Let your child choose books that *they* want to read. It is free to join the library and books can be borrowed for free as well. Librarians can help find books about hobbies, interests, sports or TV programmes.
- Buy books as presents as well as toys, and encourage friends and relatives to do the same.
- Get your child to work out which bus to take by reading the place names on the front.
- Use pop-up or lift-the-flap books to get even reluctant readers interested. They are great fun and can be borrowed from the library for free.

Try making time to:

- Learn new words together.
- Read a book together that you know well, and miss out words. Encourage your child to fill in the blanks with a word of their own. This will help you see how much they understand.
- Go to an event at your local library together. Libraries often hold free fun events and also have free internet access. You can borrow videos and CDs as well as books.
- Get your child interested in cooking by making a cake together using a recipe or letter-shaped biscuits that spell out family names.
- Make a pop-up or lift-the-flap book together. You can get 'How to' and craft books from the library – ask the librarian for help.

What should I know?

Praise is really important in encouraging a child to read. Never say a child is lazy or stupid if they don't get something right. Some children need lots of practice and encouragement. If they are struggling, remind them of other things they are good at, or things they love but had to practice to get good at (for example cycling or swimming).

A word you will hear from school when children are learning to read is 'phonics'. This means the letter and letter combination sounds rather than the letter names. Ask your child's teacher for more information.

All children learn differently. Some children need to slow down when they read, as they may be good at spotting the first letter of words and then guessing what the word says. Others need to worry less about mistakes and read all the way through the story.

If your child gets stuck, encourage them to sound out the word and use clues in the story to help them guess what the word is. Pictures can help give clues to words as well. Part of learning to be a better reader is being able to guess what new words mean and how they sound.

"In the morning, I get my kids to write me a message using fridge magnets telling me what they want for tea that day."

Mum, Scunthorpe

Moving on to different stages of reading

Once your child has learnt to read, there are lots of things you can do to help them become confident independent readers who read books, magazines, comics and newspapers for pleasure.

Instant ideas:

- Hear your child read. Remember that a good 10 minutes is better than a difficult half hour. See 'What should I know?' on page 14 for tips on hearing children reading aloud.
- Find books about things you know your child likes – for example, dinosaurs, space or maybe TV tie-ins.
- Take books with you when you go on a journey or shopping trip to help pass the time.
- Read a match report for your team together.
- Stick a map of the world on the wall and stick pins in the map to show where books you or your child have read are set or are about. You can do the same with magazine and newspaper articles.

Try making time to:

- Share articles or stories in comics, magazines or newspapers you or your child have enjoyed.
- Share the internet together. All libraries have free internet access and you could look at your team's site, music sites or find out about a favourite author or TV programme. For information about safe websites for children go to the Parents Information Network at www.pin.org.uk or Parents Online at www.parentsonline.gov.uk
- Start a family recipe collection – cut out ideas from newspapers and magazines.
- Cut up a cartoon strip from a newspaper and get your child to put it back in the right order.
- Talk about the adverts and think about what messages they are trying to get across when you are watching TV or reading a newspaper. Why not ask the 'expert' (your child) – to 'read' the advert; encourage them to use technical terms they have learnt to talk about the language and style of the advert?

What should I know?

Tips for hearing children read

Use praise every time your child reads, even if they don't get everything right first time. A 'well done' from Mum or Dad is very

motivating. Remembering 'pause, prompt, praise' helps – wait before you correct a mistake so that your child has a chance to get it right themselves, then give your child clues to help them get the word right, and finally praise them if they get the word right or even try to!

Wait until the end of a line before correcting mistakes when you are reading together. This will give time for self correction. If your child doesn't know a word, get them to guess what it means from the other words around, or say 'something' instead and go back later to work out the word. Spending some time reading together each week can really help your child progress with reading.

Long words can be made easier by clapping out the chunks of the word (syllables). For example, there are two in **luck-y** and three in **an-i-mal**.

Some children need lots of practice and others want to read the same book again and again. This is a normal part of learning to read.

"I read to my kids once they are in bed – it is a great way to spend some time with them and means that they are ready to go to sleep when we have finished."

Dad, Bristol

Supporting older primary children

Once older children have got the mechanics of reading (the 'how to'), there is a lot parents can do to help children enjoy reading. It is very important for children to see reading as something they can do in their spare time for fun, as well as a tool they need to help them at school. This is because research shows that children who read for pleasure do better at school.

Instant ideas:

- Join the local library – it costs nothing to join and books can be borrowed for free. There are lots of events going on in libraries that you can go to, and libraries can give your child the chance to choose from hundreds of books. All libraries have free internet access as well.
- Show an interest in the books your child brings home from school. This will remind them that reading is important to you.
- Get your child to read to younger brothers and sisters – this will make them feel like the 'expert' and encourage your younger children to read as well.
- Go through a TV listings guide together to choose what you want to watch.

- Play categories – write lists of different groups of things, for example, cartoon characters.
- Make up 'clerihews'. These are four line poems which start with someone's name. The second line rhymes with the name and the last two lines rhyme with each other. You could make them up for family and friends. Here are two examples;

Ant and Dec
 Cried 'Hang on a sec!
 We're not on telly tonight,
 Now that can't be right!'

Britney Spears
 Was found in tears,
 Because her new song
 Came out all wrong!

Try making time to:

- Get your child to keep a record of the books they have read, perhaps giving each book a star rating or drawing a picture or writing something about the books that will remind them of it in the future. It is important though not to make this seem like school work.
- Share taped (audio) versions of books that may be too difficult for them to read alone.
- Help your child write a letter to a friend or relative.

What should I know?

Don't forget that older children enjoy being read to. You could also read your own childhood favourites together (although don't be offended if they don't enjoy them as much as you – everyone has a different reading personality!).

It is important to let children choose what they want to read – after all adults don't like to be told what they can and can't read. If you aren't sure about choosing books, a teacher, librarian or bookseller can help you. The Booktrust (020 8516 2977) offers a guide to the 100 best children's books every year, and there are lots of websites (which you can access free at your local library) that can help as well. See the [Help](#) section at the end of this guide for ideas. Don't forget magazines, comics, newspapers and non-fiction (fact) books. Research shows that as long as children choose to read for pleasure their education benefits.

“Reading is fun if it's the book I chose.”

Year 4 pupil, Leeds

Supporting writing and spelling through reading

Writing follows on from drawing and reading. When children realise that writing is a way of telling people something, like talking, they usually want to have a go themselves. Older children's writing improves the more they read. It is what is often known as a 'virtuous circle'; (the opposite of a vicious circle) where the more you read, the better you get at reading, and the better you get at reading the better you get at writing! Parents can help this to happen by encouraging children to follow their reading interests at home and by encouraging writing for pleasure as well.

Instant ideas:

- Play join the dots with very small children – dot out the shapes of letters or draw letters in pencil and encourage your child to go over them in pen.
- Leave messages for each other on the fridge using alphabet fridge magnets.
- Get your child to write your lists for you – for example, shopping lists or 'to do' lists. They can also write lists for themselves – for example, their favourite things, music, books or people.

- Set up a 'writing wall' in your house. Stick a large piece of paper on a wall or door and encourage the whole family to add jokes, poems, slogans, questions and pictures.

Try making time to:

- Encourage your child to keep a scrap book of what they do when they are on holiday – whether you go away or not. They could stick in things they have found, bus tickets or entrance tickets to places they visit or interesting things from magazines. You could encourage them to write about interesting things that happen to them.
- Encourage your child to write their own mini plays based on a book or TV programme they have enjoyed. They could get friends round to act it out, and write their own programmes, and make posters to advertise it. Or they could make posters and write adverts to let people know about a football match or an event at school.

What should I know?

If you are writing out words for copying or learning, make sure you use lower case letters and not CAPITALS, as children find it easier to practise the patterns of letters that way.

When children are learning to write, you don't need to worry too much about tidy writing. It is more important for children to practise making the letter shapes.

Crossing out doesn't matter! Encourage your child to try out different spellings if they are not sure of a word. You could give them a sheet of scrap paper to try words out on.

"My kids spend hours writing out and acting role plays. They seem to love it. That, and writing lists. My wife gets them to do the shopping list for her."

Dad, Scunthorpe



Helping with spelling

Lots of children find spelling hard, but the good news is that there are lots of things parents can do to help throughout primary school.

Instant ideas:

- Play games with word lists. You could ask your child to put a list into alphabetical order. Try this with ice cream flavours, Premier League football teams or makes of cars.
- Play word finding games with old magazines and newspapers. You could get your child to draw a circle round every word that ends with *-ing* or every word beginning with the first letter of their name. The games can get harder as your child becomes more confident so with older children you could ask them to find words from their spelling tests from school.
- Get your child to rearrange the letters in their name or other words they know to make new words (anagrams). For example, the letters in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* can be rearranged to say 'Portray battle of frightened hero'.
- Buy a book of Junior Crosswords to help develop the number of words your child knows (their vocabulary).

Try making time to:

- Help your child find out what a new word means or how to spell a word by helping them use a dictionary. Children need help in looking up words, following alphabetical order and guessing how a word may start.
- Have a 'word of the day'. This can be a fun way of increasing vocabulary, and can be an easier or harder word, depending on their age (for example it could be 'people' for a child in Year 1 or 'anecdote' for a child in Year 6). They will need to use the word correctly in a sentence during the day, and spell it as well.

What should I know?

The most common way of learning spellings is **look, say, cover, write, check**. This means that you look at the word and speak the spelling of it out loud. Then when you think you know it, cover the word up and write it down without looking, and then check to see if you have got it right. If you have, move on to the next word, and if you haven't, try again.

Spelling in English is difficult as many words sound the same but look different (for example, where and wear). Some children will need lots of help and encouragement to learn spellings. If your child is finding a word difficult to learn, you could make it your word of the day.

Schools have lists of words that children should learn in the first few years of primary school. You could ask your child's teacher for a copy of the list and help your child to learn these words.

If your child is having a problem with a particular word, try to find a funny way for them to remember it. For example, lots of people remember how to spell Wednesday by saying it to themselves with the d sounded out ('Wed-nes-day').



What if? Worries and anxieties

What do I need to know about the National Literacy Strategy and the literacy hour?

All pupils have a daily literacy hour in primary school. Teachers use the National Literacy Strategy to teach the literacy hour, which gives detailed aims for teaching reading and writing. To find out more about the curriculum, why not order a copy of Learning Journey: A parent's guide to the primary school curriculum? You can get it free by calling 0845 60 222 60, pressing option three and quoting either 0122/2000 (for ages 3-7) or 0123/2000 (for ages 7-11). You can also download it from the publications section of www.parentcentre.gov.uk

I am really busy and don't have time to read with my child. What can I do?

10 minutes a day or even a few times a week will make a real difference to your child's reading. Why not have a look at the 'instant ideas' at the beginning of each section for quick things you can do to help.

My son doesn't like reading. What can I do?

Try to find things for him to read that are about his interests and, as much as you can, let him choose what he wants to read. Magazines, comics and non-fiction (fact) books might be more interesting to him than stories. Other reading activities, like tuning the video using a manual can also develop reading skills. Don't forget that using the internet requires reading too and there is free access at your local library. If he is interested in computer games there are lots of books on how to play the games and 'cheats' (short cuts). Praise your son for any reading he does and make sure he sees you reading too. Keep any reading you do together short and fun – even though it is worrying, pushing your son too hard or making reading a chore will put him off even more.

My child has problems with reading. How do I help?

If you are worried that your child is struggling with reading, it is best to make an appointment to see your child's teacher. You can do this by calling or visiting the school and asking to speak to the teacher by name or if you don't know this, give the name of your child and ask for their teacher. It is best to call or visit before or after the school day – be prepared to leave a message. Outline your worries (it may be helpful to write some notes to remind you before making the call) and ask to make an appointment to see them to discuss what can be done for your child.

I have/my partner has problems with reading. Can I still help my child?

Research has shown that talking to children about what they are reading, and having books and magazines at home make a difference to children's progress *even if* parents have problems with reading themselves. If you want help with reading or have a friend you think needs help, call 0800 100 900 for information on local classes and support.



My child is not getting enough support at school to help them with reading. What can I do?

If you think your child needs more support, ring your child's school and ask to speak to their teacher. It is best to call before or after the school day – be prepared to leave a message. You can talk about your worries over the phone, or set up a meeting to discuss it further. For advice on managing formal meetings with teachers, call Prolog on 0845 60 222 60 and ask for leaflet HYCL/2 (a leaflet from the DfES).

My child is not being challenged enough to improve their reading at school. What should I do?

It is important for teachers and parents to have high but realistic expectations. You and the school need to watch your child's progress carefully. Remember that children do not improve their reading steadily, but sometimes seem to get worse and then improve even more. Ask your child what they think of the books they read and look at them yourself. Make sure that your child is not getting bored by finding their books too easy, but do make sure that as often as possible, they choose the books they want to read. It is very off-putting to be told what to read. You can ask a teacher, bookseller or librarians for help with book choices. Remember that a longer book is not always more difficult, and that even confident new readers may not be ready to read long books.

If you are worried, ring your child's school and ask to speak to their teacher. It is best to call before or after the school day – be prepared to leave a message. You can talk about your worries over the phone, or set up a meeting to discuss it further. For advice on managing formal meetings with teachers, call Prolog on 0845 60 222 60 and ask for leaflet HYCL/2 (a leaflet from the DfES).

My child keeps reading the same books over and over again. Is this normal?

Children often re-read books they have enjoyed. Reading the same books or same type of books over and over helps them to build reading confidence, and children will usually move on at their own pace. Don't stop them reading books again – if you tell children what they can and can't read, it can put them off. If you are worried, you could pick some books you would like to read together – perhaps books you liked when you were small. You can ask your child's teacher, a librarian or a bookseller for advice on suitable titles.

I think my child is dyslexic. What should I do?

You will need to make an appointment to speak to the school Special Needs Coordinator (SENCO). Ring the school and ask to speak to the SENCO. It may be useful to write some notes about your worries before you make the call so that you don't forget

any points. Arrange a meeting so that you can discuss your child's needs, and get them tested for dyslexia. You can find out more about dyslexia from the British Dyslexia Association (details in [Help](#) below) by visiting their website or calling the helpline number. They can advise about the best ways to support your child.

What sort of books should I choose for my child?

Ideally, you should let your child choose books for themselves, as they are much more likely to want to read if they have had free choice. If you want ideas for books, visit a website such as www.achuka.co.uk or ask your child's teacher, a librarian or a bookseller.



Help – useful organisations and websites

Below is a list of organisations and websites where you can get more information about reading with your child.

Achuka is an independent children's book site that has something for everyone. www.achuka.co.uk

Booktrust promotes children's reading and produces a wide range of information for young readers including booklists. www.booktrusted.co.uk Tel: 020 8516 2977

British Dyslexia Association is the national organisation for specific learning difficulties. www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk Tel: 0118 966 8271 (helpline). There are many other support organisations for children with dyslexia. For more information visit www.literacytrust.org.uk/links/special.html#dyslexia

The National Literacy Trust (NLT) is a charity dedicated to building a literate nation. The NLT's website provides up-to-date information about literacy for all age groups in the UK. There is a section for parents including details of useful organisations, research, statistics, events, resources and links. www.literacytrust.org.uk Tel: 020 7828 2435 for information and advice.

The National Reading Campaign is run by the National Literacy Trust for the DfES and promotes reading across all age groups. The NRC runs schemes such as Reading Champions that

celebrates positive male role models for reluctant readers. To find out more about how the NRC can help, visit www.readon.org.uk Tel: 020 7828 2435 for help and advice.

The Parent Centre is the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) website for all parents and carers who want to help their child or children to learn. It offers support, information and advice about your child's learning and the English education system. www.parentcentre.gov.uk

Parentline Plus is a charity working with parents and families offering advice and information about parenting issues. www.parentlineplus.org.uk Tel: 0808 800 2222 (free helpline).

Reading Is Fundamental, UK is an initiative of the NLT that promotes reading for pleasure and the importance of book choice. The website offers parents advice and help on reading with their children. www.rif.org.uk Tel: 020 7828 2435.







Help your children to learn
Resources for parents

Reference HYCL



Help your children to learn
Getting the most from school reports

Reference HYCL/3



Help your children to learn
Making the most of parents' evenings

Reference HYCL/1



Help your children to learn
Making the most of time with your child

Reference HYCL/4



Help your children to learn
Formal meetings with teachers

Reference HYCL/2



Help your children to learn
How is your child doing at school?

Reference HYCL/5

Other leaflets in the series are also available.

If you would like to share your experiences, or you have any queries or require further information, please visit our website www.parentcentre.gov.uk



Help your children to learn
A guide to supporting reading for parents of secondary school children

Reference HYCL/8

This booklet was written by the National Literacy Trust working with parents in Scunthorpe, Leeds, Manchester and Runcorn.

Further copies of this leaflet, and others in the 'Help your children to learn' series, can be obtained from Prolog; 0845 60 222 60 quoting reference HYCL/7 for this leaflet and the references shown above for others in this series.