

YOUR CHILD AND READING

Information for Parents

About Reading

The age and rate at which individual children learn to read varies widely, as with most other aspects of development. Most children learn to read somewhere between the ages of three and eight. For some the process of becoming a reader can take two or three years; for others everything seems to click into place extremely rapidly and within six months of starting they are avid independent readers.

However, a small percentage of children do encounter particular difficulties in learning to read. There are a number of possible causes.

Because of the wide variation in the age and rate at which children learn to read it is often hard for parents to know when to be concerned by a child's apparent lack of progress. The best general advice is not to start worrying until your child is seven. If no progress has been made by this age, you need to take some action. It is not sensible to think that if you ignore the problem it will go away. The older children get the more difficult it becomes to deal with their reading problems.

Checklist

As a parent you may want to ask yourself whether you are giving her enough of the right kind of help at home. Read through the checklist below to make sure you are giving your child the right sort of support and encouragement and that you do not have unrealistic expectations of your child.

Do you give your child regular help with reading at home? Five minutes a day is much better than half an hour once a week.

Do you give your child plenty of time to look at a book before asking her to attempt to read it to you?

Are you using books of the right level for your child? You need easy books to encourage fluency and understanding of the story, but not something babyish which will undermine self respect. A book that is too hard and makes reading slow and uneven is impossible to understand.

Do you provide plenty of opportunities for your child to write? Remember that writing helps both reading and spelling, but there needs to be a purpose to writing e.g. cards to relatives, birthdays, Christmas cards, holiday postcards, shopping lists etc.

Does your child understand that you have confidence in his ability to read? Try not to communicate to him any worries you have about his lack of progress. Never let him feel that you expect him to fail.

Have you talked to your child's teacher? She may herself be concerned about your child's progress and be able to suggest further ways in which you can help at home, or she may feel that you are expecting too much and that your child is progressing to the best of her ability.

Do you still read to your child regularly? Enjoying books together will give her the motivation to learn to read.

Have you had your child's hearing and sight checked by a doctor? Problems with either of these will clearly affect her ability to learn.

If you are still worried, tell your child's teacher and make an appointment to see the principal teacher to discuss the situation with her. If there appears to be a severe reading problem she may suggest, or you can request, an assessment by the learning support teacher or by an educational psychologist.

Specialist Teaching

Children who are finding reading difficult can often be helped in school by a specialist or learning support teacher who will usually teach a small group, or even just one child, at a time. Care is taken to use books which have a high interest level but an easy text. With this kind of extra help most children can overcome their reading difficulties. Sometimes older children, parents and other adults are recruited to come in and give extra help to slow readers, under the supervision of a specialist teacher.

Dyslexia

Some children who experience difficulty with learning to read may well be performing normally in all other subjects. (In time, though, the inability to read will inevitably hinder nearly all schoolwork.) These children are often diagnosed as dyslexic, although not all children with reading problems can be accurately assessed in this way.

Dyslexic children frequently spell in a very bizarre way and generally have problems with any task that requires sequencing. They know which letters to write but they put them down in the wrong order.

It is a hard struggle for dyslexic children to learn to read and spell, and this is often made worse by people who do not understand the condition, believing them to be lazy.

In recent years, however, a great deal of research has been done in this area, so more is now known about how to help dyslexics. They need very special teaching, with a highly-structured programme used daily. Those who have a mild form of dyslexia often respond very rapidly to this treatment. Those who have severe dyslexia need a great deal of time and patience.