

likes about reading. Consider setting up a reward system to encourage cooperation. (Your child's teacher can offer advice.) If you are still having difficulty motivating your child to read, it may require a conversation with the teacher to come up with a plan (e.g. sharing some of the reading aloud) to make reading at home rewarding for both you and your child.

### **My child likes to skip words that are hard to figure out. Is this okay?**

In general, your child should be reading every word; however, some skipping of words is acceptable in the very beginning stages of reading as long as it doesn't detract from the meaning. Habitual skipping of words is not a good idea because children need practice figuring out unknown words, so the next time they encounter the word they will recognize it automatically.

### **My child doesn't read with expression or pay attention to punctuation. Should I be concerned?**

Don't be concerned if your child doesn't read with expression when first beginning to read. When your child can get past the words and focus on the meaning, expression will follow. By the end of the year, once your child has had more reading experience, reading will become more smooth and expressive.

It is important for your child to pay attention to punctuation because it affects comprehension. If your child ignores a period, point out how in writing the author uses a period to show us when to pause, just as we pause at the end of a sentence when we talk. The same advice applies to question marks; it is important for a child to use rising intonation to indicate a question, just as we do when we talk. Reread (either you or your child) the text to help your child become familiar with how punctuation reflects ways of speaking.

### **How much time should I spend discussing the book?**

While it is important not to interrupt the flow of reading, never assume understanding. You should occasionally pause and talk about the story. By discussing the story you are letting your child know that, no matter how simple the story, read-

ing is about making meaning. This also encourages children to monitor their own understanding of the text.

You might ask your child to predict what will happen next or to relate something in the story to a personal experience. If your child has difficulty engaging in an open-ended conversation about a book, you might ask specific questions (e.g. Where did the character go? What was the problem in the story?). But remember that reading should be enjoyable, so excessive questioning should be avoided.

### **Now that my child is reading, should I stop reading aloud?**

There are some very important reasons to continue reading to children, even after they begin reading to you. Early on, your child's listening comprehension level far exceeds her/his reading level (i.e., your child can understand much more sophisticated text than your child is capable of reading). When you are reading aloud, select good literature that mentally challenges your child and is too hard to read alone (e.g. try reading books with chapters). The benefits of ongoing exposure to good literature include development of a rich vocabulary and background knowledge about the world that is important for reading comprehension.



**Most of all, have fun as you witness the miracle of a beginning reader.**

**Resource:** *Straight Talk about Reading: How Parents can Make a Difference during the Early Years* by Susan Hall and Louisa Moats

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# **When Your Child Is Reading to You**

## *Tips for Parents*



**Learning to read** ranks with the first step taken or first word spoken as a major milestone in your child's life. Reading is a basic tool that your child will need for success throughout his/her entire school career and beyond. Parents are eager to know how they can support their child at home as this important skill is developing.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to answer questions parents frequently ask during this period of role reversal, when their child begins doing the reading and parents become the listeners. However, the general information provided here is not meant to replace the specific advice a teacher can offer about your child.

## Is it important to read at a regular time daily?

Children need the opportunity to read, read, read. Ideally a child should read every day, but realistically daily life is subject to schedule changes and interruptions. Establishing a reading routine, including finding a quiet place and time when interruptions will be kept to a minimum, will help ensure that your child has the opportunity to read as often as possible.

## How do I help my child choose appropriate reading books?

Your child's teacher will begin sending home "just right" books, for your child to read aloud to you, sometime in October. A good rule of thumb is if your child is unable to read 95% of the words in a book without struggling, the book is too difficult. When choosing a book for your child, it can be helpful to preview the book and compare it to the "just right" books your child's teacher is sending home. Some characteristics to consider include:

- print font size
- number of words per page
- pictures (Do the illustrations provide clues about the story?)
- number of punctuation marks (e.g. few is better; beginning readers find quotation marks confusing)
- vocabulary level (i.e. most words should be within your child's oral vocabulary)

Keep in mind that your child's teacher will be working with your child to help him/her learn how to independently choose a "just right" book.

## Should I discourage my child from reading a book that is too hard?

To a certain extent, this depends on your child. Two factors should be taken into consideration: how well your child comprehends the story, and your child's level of frustration. If your child has just finished reading a page but is struggling and can't tell you anything about that page, it would be wise to select a different book at the right reading level. Some children will become discouraged when trying to read a book that is too hard. Since no one voluntarily engages in an activity that is frustrating, it is best to select a less intimidating book and

keep the reading experience enjoyable.

Other children seem to enjoy the challenge and may be highly motivated to read a particular book (perhaps their friend recommended it). In this case, respect your child's choice and consider alternating reading pages to make the experience less arduous. Just be sure your child is not choosing overly difficult books to "save face" (i.e. keep up with classmates). Let your child know that children progress at their own rates and you respect effort, not outcome.

## Should I discourage my child from rereading a book that is too easy?

It is common for children learning to read to choose a book that is easy for them, or below their reading level. While listening to your child read the same book over and over again may seem tedious, it can actually be beneficial as repeated reading of easy books builds reading fluency (i.e. the ability to read quickly and smoothly). However, if your child seems "stuck" in this stage, check with his/her teacher for some suggestions.

## What should I do if my child misreads a word?

Deciding which errors to correct can be tricky. Generally, it is best not to jump in too quickly. Sometimes children will correct the word themselves when they finish the sentence and realize what they just read doesn't make sense. Use your good judgment and ignore some errors that do not disrupt the meaning.

## When my child encounters an unknown word while reading, what should I do to help, if anything?

This situation also requires that you use common sense. First of all be patient; wait 5 seconds for your child to apply the strategies s/he is developing as a reader to figure out the unknown word. If the unknown word can be "sounded out" and your child has adequate knowledge of the sounds and letters, then it is best to ask your child to figure it out. While this "sounding out" strategy won't always work because letters can have more than one sound, in the long run it is likely to be the most helpful clue. Other types of clues, such as guessing the word

from its use in the sentence or by looking at the picture on the page can help confirm word reading accuracy.

If the unknown word can't be sounded out (i.e. it is irregular), then it is best to supply the word. It is better to tell a child some words to maintain the "flow of reading" rather than insist that the child figure out every word independently. Regardless of whether you supply the unknown word or your child figures it out, encourage him/her to repeat the word and reread the sentence. Going back to the beginning of the sentence in which the unknown word occurred helps your child recall the word the next time that word is encountered.

Remember that your role as a parent is to enjoy reading with your child, so don't feel responsible for using teaching techniques that you are not comfortable using. Your role is to support, not try to be the teacher.

## Should I encourage my child to point to the words while reading?

If your child frequently loses his/her place while reading, then following along with a finger is an excellent way to track print. Losing the place on the page interferes with reading comprehension because it diverts attention from figuring out unknown words and makes it more difficult to remember the words already read. Don't be concerned that pointing will become a habit that is hard to break later. Many children go through this "finger-pointing" stage and simply drop it when they don't need it. Sometimes a child dislikes using a finger but still needs help in keeping his/her place; in these cases using a bookmark sideways can be helpful. If it is difficult for your child to coordinate moving the bookmark down the page while reading, you might try moving the bookmark for him/her.

## What do I do if my child resists reading aloud to me?

Try addressing the external variables first—make sure the *time of day* (your child has had an opportunity to decompress from the demands of school but isn't too tired yet) and *place* (quiet and inviting) are good. Be sure that the reading materials are appropriate (see above) and of interest to your child. Ask your child what s/he likes and dis-