

Doorstep Library
Helping children to read - Julia
Dixon – April 2021, using content
from our training documents.



Helping children to read



Very young children

It's never too early to start reading with children – even young babies enjoy being read to!

See if the **child can identify** animals, colours and characters verbally first without your help and let this lead to discussion. Have fun with animal noises!

Decide which book you are reading **first**, then if there is time give a choice between 2 books for a second story (remember very young children find it difficult to make up their mind: they want it all!)

Home Reading Volunteers

Encourage them to turn the page for you.

Lend two books: Ask the parent/carer to choose at least one of them.

Pre-readers

Look for certain letters or sounds to identify.

e.g. there's an 's', your name starts with that sound, Sssssarah.

Ask questions about their **own experiences** related to the story/pictures e.g. have you ever been to a beach before? Which is your favourite colour?

Any books with a repetitive, rhythmic or rhyming text can be excellent to engage the child to join in without needing to decipher words.

Home Reading Volunteers:

You can trace the words you are reading with your finger occasionally. You could ask them to have a go, and praise them when they keep their pointing finger under the words and move from left to right.

We have lots more information about early years children - including book suggestions, reading tips and brain facts – in our Early Years section

Emergent readers

Reading to a child

Ask the child to look at the **front cover** and talk about their ideas of what the story might be about. Make predictions together and discuss characters or objects as much as possible.

Make sure the child understands what you have read, ask often what s/he thinks of the situation and what will happen next.

Have fun with using **different voices**, with phrasing or expression. Without worrying about the actual words, repeat some speech to each other in an acting way and encourage the child to be relaxed enough to practice some different expressive voices.

Make sure that the child is **enjoying** listening to you. If it is not a success: change book! Alternatively suggest reading together.

The more fun they have sharing books with you, the more likely it is that they will want to learn to read for themselves.

Don't forget that all children learn to read at different paces. If you're sharing lots of books with them, along with maybe some action songs, that's already a great start on their reading journey.

When the child is ready to read with you

Phonics

Children are taught to read using phonics. It is important to be able to support emergent readers by understanding phonics and the sounds used at school, which may have changed since you learned to read. The order in which the sounds are taught will vary depending on which scheme is used at school, but it won't be alphabetical order because that's not the best order to allow a child to start blending the sounds for reading.

To learn more about phonics, take a look at [Phonics - a brief overview](#)

Reading using phonics

- 1. Say sounds correctly. This is really important when a child is learning to read. Take a look at this guide to check the letter sounds. Remember not to add an *uh* to the end of the consonant sounds – so say *mmm* not *muh*, *lll* not *luh*, etc. because then later it's easier to blend the sounds together to make words.**
- 2. Some sounds are represented by more than one letter such as *sh* in ship, *ch* in chat, *th* in thin, *qu* in quick and *ng* in sing.**
- 3. Putting sounds together to read simple words. Say the sounds *c-a-t* to read cat, *sh-o-p* to read shop and *s-t-r-ee-t* to read street. If the child gets stuck and is struggling to blend the sounds, say the sounds yourself, quickly, until the child can hear the word!**
- 4. Some words cannot be sounded out, these are called tricky words. Some examples of high frequency tricky words are: the, who, all, what, to, no, I, was, my, said. Children will learn to recognise these over time. Take a look at our brief overview of phonics for more information.**

While children learn to read, they will probably be exposed to a mix of very simple books designed to practise phonics, and longer or more complex stories which teachers and parents will share with them.

Keep the atmosphere light, offer to read a line/page each with reluctant readers.

Give the child space and time to think about a word, encourage them to look at the sounds in the word.

If a child gets stuck on a word, let them know what the word is and move on so that you don't lose the momentum and the story.

A good rule of thumb is if there are **five** words in a page that the child cannot read the book is too difficult.

Because of the focus on phonics, children may become focused on sounding out and blending sounds to make words, and may forget to think about their meaning. There's a lot going on! So it's important to help them with their comprehension as well.

Ask child if he/she understands words or phrases he/she has read e.g. do you know what *promptly* means?

After the child has read a little, ask some questions about **his/her understanding** of the story. What happened? Does she/he know why someone feels or acts the way they do in the story? Can she/he predict what might happen next?

For Doorstep Library volunteers, the discussion and interest in a book is more important than the reading of the words, especially when the child is still developing their skills and trying to enjoy the world of books.

Never cover a picture. There is a reason why children's books are picture books, they are there to support a child with the reading in a visual way. Pictures are great for sharing and talking about a story (which is really important!) but don't encourage the child to use pictures to guess the words that they don't already know. Instead, you can pause reading from time to time, look at the pictures, and talk about what's happening in the book.

Encourage parents who are not at ease with reading or reading in English to use picture books without worrying about the text, just talking about the pictures (i.e. guessing what is happening). Stress the quality time both will have.

Parents whose first language is not English can make up stories in their own language - occasionally you can look for bilingual books or books in their own language. Tell them that it will help their children to develop imagination and thinking skills.

What to say to help them sound out words

- What sounds can you hear in that word?
- What is the first letter? Where is it?
- Sound out the letters, put the sounds together quickly and say the word.
- Where do we start?
- What is a word that starts with that letter?
- What is a word that starts with that sound?

Fluent readers

Encourage children to discuss a story and make links with their knowledge of other stories, their own experiences of the world around them.

Notice punctuation and how to use it to phrase sentences appropriately. When they see speech marks, "... " they should use different voices for different characters. They should change their tone when they see exclamation marks, question marks and bold writing. Encourage the child to be relaxed enough to practice some different expressive voices.

They should make corrections **on their own**, as they read

Missing out a word and reading on can help. They then can go back to the missed word and repeat the phrase.

Do not stop the reading on each page. At the end of the book, or passage, you can go back to what they did well, and maybe pick out one or two points to work on together.

Discuss the meaning of phrases or words which are more complicated or advanced.

Know the books you are offering to be able to have a conversation about them.

Ensure that it is not too difficult. There are special books for reluctant or struggling readers with interests appropriate to their age (make sure that they do not feel that they are treated as "babies").

Discuss what they would like next.

Encourage them to be ambitious when appropriate.

Ask them to read aloud to you for fun! Encourage them to read with their parents for fun!

Examples of questions you can ask them about the story, so that they understand and enjoy it:

- What did he do that was nice?
- How did Mum trick Greedy Cat?
- Would you like to have Jake for a brother?
- What do you think Dad is going to do?

Comments to help with individual words:

- Does that look and sound right?
- Run a finger under it, say the word slowly.
- What can we do if we are stuck on a word?
- Where is the hard bit?
- What could this word be?
- You said '_____'. Is that what the word is?
- You tried to think of that word. That was good!
- You found out what was wrong all by yourself, well done!

What to say so the reading makes sense

- Would '___' fit in here? Does it make sense?
- You said '___'. Can we say it in that way?
- What do you think?
- '___' is asking a question. How would he/she ask the question? (Using a question voice).

Take a look at our [Engaging children with books](#) section to get more tips on shy or reluctant readers, or [pointers](#) on how to run an engaging session.