

QUESTIONS PARENTS OFTEN ASK ABOUT THEIR CHILD'S READING

1. How can I help David figure out the word?

Firstly, avoid fixating on the word! Give David time to look for the clues in the rest of the sentence, in the illustrations, or simply encourage him to go back to the beginning of the sentence. Relax and trust... he needs time to piece it together. We want David to be independent so don't jump in to rescue him. Avoid eye contact because the clue is in the book and not on your face. You will not be sitting next to him in the classroom when he next comes to a word he does not know. Ask David to read ahead to collect more information. If he can't read ahead, it is ok for you to finish the sentence and then ask: "What word do you think would fit here and make sense?" Encourage David to reread, skip the word, or guess a word that would make sense. Ask him self-monitoring question prompts: does that look right? does that sound right? does that make sense? He could use picture cues, look for chunks and words hidden in bigger words, or make a good guess. Encourage him to go back and re-read the whole sentence. These are the strategies he will use as an independent reader.

2. I've sounded the word out, but Sally still doesn't know what the word is! What can I do?

Sounding out a word is the least effective strategy. Most words can't be sounded out. Children often look like they are sounding out a word when, in fact, they are looking ahead and taking some time to piece the sentence together. Encourage Sally to read for meaning – ask, "What word would fit here and make sense?" Or simply say: "Read on, reread, look for clues in the text such as the illustration, or skip the word". Struggling readers often try to sound a word out and they become frustrated when it does not work. Avoid the frustration. Reading is not a test. Set Sally up for success. Complete an orientation to the book prior to the reading. Introduce her to unfamiliar words and talk about the book. By spending the first few minutes doing an orientation, you can avoid interrupting the reading and Sally can build confidence and fluency because she comprehends what she reads.

3. How do I make my Jordan read faster?

There is no magic speed for reading. We talk at different speeds and we read at different speeds. If your child reads particularly slowly or extremely fast, try doing shared reading. This strategy models how good reading sounds. Children need to develop a sense of what a good reader sounds like and these strategies help their confidence and fluency. By modelling good reading, you support your child's success.

4. Sam only ever wants to read the same book over and over. How do I get him to read others?

Never make a child's choice wrong. If there is something in this particular book that Sam enjoys, enjoy it with him. Every time Sam comes back to a book, he finds new things; things he may not have noticed before. It could simply be an illustration, a word or something about the setting or characters. Ask him why he likes this particular book and maybe you will learn something more about your child's interests.

Take time to share the book one more time and then say, "I would love to read your book with you and then I would like to share this book that I found on the shelf". Keep offering invitations into the world of books and without pressure your child will expand his repertoire.

Trust that they will move on when they discover something else that is more exciting.

5. Katie never reads out loud. How do I know she is reading correctly?

Reading is not a test. Children need opportunities to read aloud and silently. Not every reading session has to be done out loud. Try relaxing with your own book and read in silence with your child. Reading a book is not about reading correctly; it is about understanding. All you need to do is respond as you would to your adult friends. Talk about the book with Katie. Avoid interrogation. Have a discussion about the content, events, characters, author's style or share opinions. Celebrate when Katie takes her book to bed to read by the bed-light. That is what independent readers do!

6. Lucas refuses to read at home. How can I get him to read?

You create a community of readers. Reading time is a family routine. Does the family have access to interesting books? Are the books prominently displayed? Does Lucas have a place to store his books? Does Lucas have opportunities to borrow books from the library or select books from the local book shop? Does he have a reading light so he can go off to bed and read independently? Does Lucas see his parents enjoying reading? Are books discussed at the dinner table, while driving, while fishing... at every opportunity? Does your family make regular visits to the local library? Do you turn the TV off and have a time when the family reads together? If you only turned the TV off for 30 minutes a night, Lucas might find a book to fill the void!

7. I'm worried that Jane is only reading the words on the page and she does not understand what the book is about. How can I check this?

There are two ways you can understand what Jane comprehends when she reads. The first is to ask using questions such as: "Tell me about this story so far...". "Why do you think that X happened?" "What do you think will happen next?" The second is to listen to Jane's miscues. Miscues are deviations from the text and give you a good insight into whether or not she is reading for meaning. When Jane substitutes a word with a similar meaning to the one in the text, she is reading for meaning. The word might be "horse" and Jane reads "pony" – in this case, meaning is being maintained and she does not need to be corrected at this point. If however, the word is "horse" and Jane reads "house", this miscue could indicate that she has lost meaning. If Jane continues to miscue and lose meaning, simply switch to shared reading.

8. The other children in Matt's class seem to read much better than him. How well should he be reading at age 8?

How do we gauge "good reading"? This is a difficult question for the best researchers in reading. Does good reading have to be reading out aloud? Reading out aloud is

not a performance but is often judged that way. Some children are less confident when reading aloud not because they can't read, but because they feel embarrassed or ashamed. The most natural way to read is silently. Children need lots of opportunities to snuggle up with a book. Spend time with Matt, relaxing with books. Talk about books and build a sense of confidence and desire to read. When Matt discovers the love of books, establishing his reading age will become less of a concern -- you won't be able to stop him from reading. Enjoy reading together and model a love of books. Both parents are important in the process. Boys in particular, need to see their dads enjoying a book. Dads need to read to their sons. Parents often become overly anxious that their children are "slipping behind" their peers. All children are different. Matt may have learned to talk early, or much later than his peers. He may have learned to walk before 12 months, or much later. As his parents, you accommodated such differences. You expected him to succeed -- you knew that he would eventually talk and walk. When it comes to reading, parents' expectations are often tainted with fear and anxiety. It is this fear and anxiety that often gets transferred onto the child. The child senses "there is something wrong here" and responds accordingly. The essential thing is to build on your child's strengths. Link reading to his interests and make reading a fun family thing to do. Relax and enjoy the time you spend reading together and you will find Matt responds positively. Limit the time to 10 minutes a day in the first few weeks so that the anxiety is lessened and you can share the best 10 minutes of Matt's day with a book.

9. How do I know that Kristy hasn't just memorised the book?

Memorising the book is just part of the reading process. It may look like memorising to you but Kristy is actually modelling reading and behaving like a reader. These things need to be celebrated. Sit back and enjoy watching Kristy grow and develop in the world of literacy. Acknowledge that she is actually picking up a book and wanting to read. Many children are not interested enough to find a book. A child who feels like a reader, looks like a reader and acts like a reader will continue to develop a love of books and master the reading process.

10. Should I cover up the pictures? Ben seems to be just making the story up using the pictures.

The pictures hold vital clues to what is happening in the story. Readers need all the support they can get to understand the events of the story. Sometimes pictures complement the story; other times a different story is being told through the pictures. Either way, pictures are a story within the story. Allow Ben the time it takes to look at the pictures. Prior to reading together, spend time discussing the pictures. This is part of the book orientation and can be most beneficial in scaffolding his reading attempts. Reading is not a test. When Ben is reading independently, he needs to know where to look for extra clues in piecing the story together. These clues are often in the pictures.

When children begin to read, they retell the story through the illustrations. When they do this, they are indicating what they know about books. They often use the language of the books. They recall the events of the story and it is not unusual for young, developing readers to gather an enthusiastic audience made up of their friends.