

# READING: STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS

In response to inquiries from numerous parents who requested guidance in helping their children become more efficient and proficient readers, we at THE READING CENTER have developed criteria containing vital background information about reading and strategies that parents can implement to help their children.

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## Reading Is Comprehension

Many parents have asked for help in working with their children's reading. We have compiled some information and suggestions that we hope you find useful in helping your child in becoming an independent, fluent reader.

As we work with children's literacy in general and especially those who have difficulty with reading, we have made many observations. The most obvious observation is that children who believe they are not good readers have focused most of their efforts on word-perfect reproduction. They think that reading means saying all of the words right.

Making text sound as it was written is an important aspect of reading, but **reading is to construct meaning**, and even adult proficient readers do not "say all the words right!" The reading process involves more than that. It concentrates more on how readers use sound/symbol relationships (phonics), syntax (grammar), and semantics (meaning) in concert to develop an understanding of text.

## What Adult Proficient Readers Do

As adult proficient readers, we do not perfectly recreate the text when we read. Instead, as we sample the words in the text, we automatically use all of our general background knowledge and our expectations of what we think the text will say based on pictures, titles, headings, etc.; we reflect on our previous experiences in general and with this type of text; and we consider our purpose for reading it.

Based on all of this, we make predictions about what we think the text will say. We only sample enough print for it to make sense to us, and when it does, we read on. For example - the sentence says: "The horse ran down the road." and we predict: "The pony ran down the road." It has made perfect sense to us based on the previously listed criteria and we read on.

However, if we predict: "The house ran down the road," readers reading for meaning will know that the sentence does not make sense, and they will need to reread that part of the text that was not meaningful or read on to try to figure out the meaning of the unknown word, phrase, or concept. This is a description of what an adult proficient reader does, all in a matter of seconds.

## What Is Important

It is important that your reader is aware that **reading should make sense and sound like language** and if it does not, there are strategies other than sounding out or asking for help that will move her along in text and help it make sense.

## Strategies That Can Help

Some of the strategies that can help your readers and writers become proficient and develop strategies other than sounding out or asking for help are listed below. These will encourage your child to make predictions and take risks based on meaning, syntax, and sound/symbol relationship.

## About sounding out . . .

Sounding out is a perfectly good strategy, and one we all use, but when sounding out is the major strategy a reader uses, it begins to take so much time that the reader has forgotten the meaning of what came before the unknown word. Comprehension as well as fluency is affected.

### STRATEGY ONE

#### Read To Them

The most important thing you can do for your reader is to read to him. Read things that he is interested in and things for just pure enjoyment. Stop and talk with him about what you have just read - you thought it was funny, he liked the way the author said something, you liked that idea. Talk about any part of the story or writing that you want.

Point out different aspects of the text like: see how the pictures help tell the story, did you hear all those rhyming words, what do you think will happen next, look at all the lines that repeat, see how long that word is, did you notice all the words that started with Z, we already know a lot about this story because of something else we've read or heard about, etc.

Remember, as a significant adult in your reader's life, your uses of reading and writing for real purposes, including enjoyment and information, are the most powerful demonstrations you can give. Just as your child learned about speaking from your demonstrations, she will learn about reading through your modeling of it.

### STRATEGY TWO

#### Uninterrupted Reading

**Remember that the most important aspect of reading is constructing meaning.** If you have a reader who reads making some miscues (unexpected responses to text) that are mostly meaning-making, do not interrupt except when the miscues do not make sense or do not sound like language.

If a reader reads the sentence "The horse ran down the road" as "The pony ran down the road," do not "correct" her. That sentence made sense in the context of the story and sounded like language. But if she reads "The house ran down the road," ask her if that made sense.

Then ask her to reread the text to make it sensible. If the reader says it did make sense, ask her to reread it anyway because it didn't make sense to you, the listener. **Focusing readers on reading to make sense is what is most important.**

### STRATEGY THREE

#### Skip and Go On

Too often we have readers who will not take any kind of risk in an attempt to read something unknown. They use no other strategy than sound-it-out or ask for help. So, when a reader comes to something he doesn't know and cannot identify, after a very brief sounding out attempt (no more than a couple of seconds), ask him to skip the unknown word (phrase, concept, etc.) and read on to try to gain the meaning through the context of the rest of that sentence or maybe several of the following sentences to help determine the unknown word.

Or, suggest that he rereads the previous context to help find the meaning of the unknown word. Sometimes just hearing the rest of the sentence or the beginning of the sentence again provides enough information to give a clue to the unknown word.

This is an automatic strategy used by efficient and proficient readers. Since reading is a meaning construction

process, knowing how to say the word is much less important than knowing what the sentence says in this particular context.

## **STRATEGY FOUR**

### **Predict To Make Sense**

When the reader comes to something she doesn't know and she is unable to identify the unknown word through a very brief sounding out attempt, ask her to skip the word and go on. If she is uncomfortable skipping words entirely, try covering the unknown word up with your (or the reader's) finger. Then ask the reader to predict a substitute word that would make sense.

You can narrow the possible predictions by focusing the reader on the beginning sound of the unknown word. For example, the sentence might say "The giant fell into the ocean and drowned!" and the reader does not know the word "ocean". There may be enough context in the first part of the sentence for her to predict a meaningful substitution (if not, you would encourage the reader to read the rest of the sentence to gain more meaning from context to help predict the unknown word. (See Strategy 1).

Ask her what would make sense there or what would make sense that starts with the letter O. The reader may use picture cues, previous context, sound-symbol relationships (phonics), her background knowledge, syntax (his intuitive sense of how language should sound) and previous experiences - all of the linguistic knowledge he possesses - to predict something that will make sense at the sentence level and at the whole text level.

## **STRATEGY FIVE**

### **Modified Cloze Procedure**

The modified cloze procedure is also a way that readers can practice these strategies. To use this procedure block out words that could easily be predicted based on meaning and replace them with a blank. With the unknown words eliminated, the non risk-taking reader should be more willing to try to predict instead of sounding out.

This will help your reader gain confidence when he sees that the word does not need to be in place for there to be a meaningful substitution. You can also block out all but the beginning sound of a word which will narrow the possible predictions.

## **STRATEGY SIX**

### **Line Marker**

Some readers have trouble focusing on lines of text or get distracted when there are several lines. Have your reader use a word or line marker such as a pencil, index card or his finger to act as a guide to help her stay on track with the text as she reads.

The marker will help your reader focus on phrases or chunks of language which will help with fluency. It will also help her focus on the beginning sound, which will help with predictions more than middle or end sounds do.

## **STRATEGY SEVEN**

### **Retelling**

After your reader has completed a piece of text (a story, chapter, article, etc.) or at any good "stopping" point along the way have him pretend that you were not there listening and have him retell you what he read. Or, actually have him tell someone who was not there listening.

If he has problems retelling all of the text, stop him along the way and have him tell you about what he has read so far. The reader can also make predictions about what will happen next. Again, the most important aspect of reading is understanding what is read.

This retelling strategy will give you a very good indication whether the reader has comprehended, even if he has had many miscues. **NOTE:** Be aware that children, especially non proficient readers, are often asked surface level, recall questions that may require only one word or very brief answers. The more readers are asked to retell, the better they will become - if indeed they are reading for meaning.

## **STRATEGY EIGHT**

### **Responsive Writing**

Ask your reader to write about the parts of the story that she likes best and share that writing with you. This will be a first draft effort, so again the focus is on meaning. Editing is important but will come later, after there is good content to edit.

You can vary open ended questions in any way including what he or she would do to change the story, what the reader liked best or least about the story, what she would do if she was the main character, what she would ask the author, etc. Try to keep the questions open-ended and more like a grand conversation than a school-like inquisition.

## **STRATEGY NINE**

### **Rereading**

There are many things which will help your reader develop fluency. Encourage him to reread several pieces of text that he feels comfortable with. Each time he rereads the piece, the reading will become more comfortable and make your reader more sure of himself. These "warm-up" pieces of text will make your reader feel good and confident about his reading.

## **STRATEGY TEN**

### **Reading Is Fun**

Providing lots of fun poems, rhymes, short jokes, riddles, and predictable books etc. will also help your reader develop fluency and feel good about reading. This will let her hear that she can make reading sound like language and that it can be fun and easy.

## **STRATEGY ELEVEN**

### **Language Experience**

Language experience (an adult writes exactly what the child orally composes - a story, poem, etc.) and writing his own stories can benefit your reader's reading and writing.

This will allow your reader to read something that he is familiar with, has background knowledge of, and also interests him. These are factors to take into consideration when choosing materials to help a reader become more fluent and interested in reading.

## **STRATEGY TWELVE**

### **Echo Reading/Partner Reading**

**Echo reading**- the child's voice is close behind the proficient reader's voice as they read a favorite book or try out a new piece, or **partner reading** - the child and the proficient reader read a piece in a duet- are both strategies that can help your reader become more fluent in reading, support her efforts and help children move toward becoming independent readers.

These strategies are to reading what running along side a child trying to ride a two wheeled bike is to bike riding - the adult supports until the child can do the act independently.

## **STRATEGY THIRTEEN**

### **Reading To Others**

Having your reader read to younger children, into a tape recorder to share with younger readers, or even to a stuffed animal can help him achieve the fluency needed to develop good comprehension.

This encourages reading "for a purpose," and can help readers understand that they must read so that it can be understood by their listening audience.

## **STRATEGY FOURTEEN**

### **Sustained Silent Reading (SSR)**

Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) can help your reader become exposed to a wide variety of materials while experiencing reading. As part of SSR it is important that your reader is given a wide range of choices including story books, chapter books, reference materials, popular periodicals - any fiction or nonfiction that holds his interest. This will build background knowledge that will help him understand what has been read.

Being exposed to a variety of materials and reading them silently for his own pleasure or information will contribute to the proficiency and efficiency of your reader. Again, one of the best things you can do for your reader as a significant adult in his life is read yourself while the child is reading. Nothing works better than lots of good demonstrations.

## **STRATEGY FIFTEEN**

### **Written Conversation**

To help your reader become more fluent in writing you can take part in a Written Conversation. This involves a conversation in which two people "talk" to each other about topics of interest to both of you - on paper.

Again, this is first draft writing and the focus should be on the content, not the spelling or form. You can demonstrate standard spelling and form in your end of the conversation. If you are not able to read what the child writes, ask the child to read it to you.

## **STRATEGY SIXTEEN**

### **Previewing a Text**

Previewing a text can be an excellent strategy for familiarizing your reader with text. Previewing involves looking at pictures, graphs, charts, chapter questions, etc. to gain vital information from text. It also allows the reader to see if the content is something the reader already knows something about. If it is, previewing can help make those connections.

## **STRATEGY SEVENTEEN**

### **Journal Writing**

Journal writing can benefit all readers and writers because it connects both reading and writing. After reading a story both you and your writer can express your thoughts about what you have read in a journal.

Topics that you can write about vary and can include such things as what you liked/disliked about the story, your favorite character, what made the reading hard/easy for you, etc. (See Strategies 1, 7 & 8 for other topic suggestions.)

Journal writing can help both you and your reader connect text with your personal background experience and your lives in general.

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The strategies listed above focus on reading and writing. It is important to remember that the only way to improve at either is to constantly engage in those literacy acts.

Provide your reader with fun things to read and write about that are interesting to him. Have him read things silently or aloud and have him talk to you about what he has read in the form of a grand conversation, not a school-like inquisition.

The most important thing to remember is to have your reader keep on reading because the more he reads the better his reading will be.

As always, our intentions are to help build your reader's strengths and to help him become a more proficient, independent, and joyous reader and writer. If we can be of any further help to you, please let us know.

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EBD Home

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## Reading Strategies

# Useful Strategies to Assist your Child with Reading

**Establish a routine at home for reading:** It could be before bed, on a Sunday night or whenever suits you and your child. You could even have a regular reading night where the whole family gets together and reads. This is one of the best ways for developing a lifelong positive attitude to reading.

**Praise every effort:** Especially when confidence is low, and even when confidence is high. Help your child feel good about reading.

**Treat the child as an individual:** Don't compare their performance with other children - it doesn't help because it makes them feel as though they are not good enough.

**Be a role model:** Let them see you reading. Take the family to the local library and take an interest in what types of books they borrow. You can even make suggestions, but resist the temptation to impose your own choices.

**Show them that books are worthwhile:** Give books as presents and show your child how to take care of them.

**Encourage consistent use of the school library:** Ask your child about the books they have borrowed and share them with your child.

**If your child is a non reader, don't feel guilty.** The causes of reading problems are very complex and if your child is experiencing difficulties with this fundamental skill, the best thing you can do is to acknowledge the problem and do something about it.

**Practical Ideas:**

[Getting Started with Reading](#)

[Back to Parents Resource](#)

We'll add more reading strategies in the very near future, so make sure you've bookmarked our pages for more ideas.

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