

Helping your Child to Read

Chapter 1 – So What’s the Problem?

“ Jane still can’t read some of the words in her new reading book even though she could read them perfectly well in her last book. I have told her that from now on she will go straight to her bedroom when we get in from school and come out when she can remember them. Is she having the same problems at school?”

A parent wrote this comment, which I was rather concerned to read, in a pupil’s “Home School Diary.” Here’s another:

“ I’m so sorry that I haven’t heard Neil read all week, I feel terrible but my mother-in-law is staying with us.”

I replied, “I’ve heard some excuses...” to which the mother replied,

“You haven’t met my mother-in-law!”

Although the second comment is a lot more relaxed, both show concern and even anxiety on behalf of the parents because, like numerous parents, both understand the importance of learning to read and want to do their best to help their child acquire the necessary skills. But what is the best way?

Only last week I was standing next to a mother at my granddaughter’s school watching them play on the outdoor apparatus before taking them home. Out of the blue this intelligent, apparently well-informed mum said, I wish Josh would do that.”

“What?” I asked.

“Swing from the monkey bars. I read an article the other day that said that children who swing from monkey bars are normally more advanced in their reading development.”

She was quite serious.

How this book will help you

In all my years of teaching the subject that appears to cause the most concern to parents is reading. Parents know how important the skill of reading is and therefore are anxious that their child acquires this skill. However they may not know how best to support their child. An additional problem for parents is that there are so many stories in the media about children leaving school without essential basic literacy skills. There are also a number of articles full of experts' opinions about how children can best learn to read and these are always changing. One minute it seems that teaching phonics is essential, the next it will seriously hamper your child's progress. No wonder parents are confused!

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What we do know is that children's approach to reading can be greatly influenced by their experience of books. Children who have had stories read to them come to associate stories with pleasure, a pleasure often shared with someone they love.

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Children need encouragement but they don't need to be pressurised into learning to do things earlier than they normally would. Children learn best when adults work with them in a secure and happy environment that is interesting and fun. In all my years of teaching, I have found that children (of all ages) who make the most progress, no matter what their starting point, are the ones who are confident with high self-esteem and look on reading as a pleasurable activity.

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This book will answer all the common questions that most concern parents. For example: When should I start reading to my child? How can I help my child when they first start to read a book? What types of books are best for my child when they first start to read? My child struggles to read a whole page, then loses interest. What can I do?

It is full of activities and games that will improve reading skills and can be played by all the family. It explains how to introduce the alphabet and the 100 High Frequency Words that make up approximately 50% of children's literature. It contains comprehensive children's book lists (for various age groups and book genres) and recommended Internet sites.

All of the methods, activities and games contained within this book I have used successfully with children I have taught and with my own children and grandchildren. It is not presented in a lesson format promising that you can teach your child to read in 140 lessons or by teaching them for 15 minutes every day. I want to take the pressure away from you; your child wants you to be their parent not their teacher. Some of the activities have to be taught in sequence but most can be used according to how your child responds to them, how they are feeling, what their particular weaknesses or strengths are, how much time you have to spare or where you are at the time.

You will not have to be an expert. This book provides you with easy to follow guidance and gives you the confidence to actively support your child in learning to read. It will make learning great fun for both parent and child and give your child the head start that they need.