

## Helping Your Child to Read

### Excerpt from Chapter 3- School Age Children

When a child first brings home a reading book that they have been asked to read with you it may be an activity that you have looked forward to for some time. It may also be one that carries certain concerns. How much should they read each day? What do I do if they can't read a word, do I make them sound it out or tell them? What if they can't read any of the book? Helping your child to read can seem like a daunting task to many parents.

Then there is the problem of comparing one's child with other children in their class. Please don't, this is not a race. Hearing about how well that your child's classmates are doing, from their parents, can make you anxious and concerned about your child's progress, it's natural. Just remember, all children develop at different rates, all have strengths and all have weaknesses. If you were constantly being compared to another person in a negative way how would that affect your self-esteem? Just enjoy the closeness that reading together brings and know that by supporting your child you are ensuring their progress.

The following points and activities are intended for children who are learning to read and many of the activities will be beneficial for older children too. I have arranged the activities in a "question and answer" form to help you select the areas that are of most interest to you or that you are most anxious about.

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#### **6. What should I do if my child can't read a particular word?**

Don't spend ages making your child attempt to "sound out" a word. This is a big trap that many parents fall into. At school, children begin by gradually building up their knowledge of initial sounds, a for apple etc. Then they are taught to blend sounds together e.g. st for stop. Therefore they may not have the understanding of the sounds needed to sound out the word. Also, although many words can be sounded out, not all can. Try making your child sound out "build" "were" and what about "tough", "bough", "cough" and "dough"? If a child has to constantly stop to do this it will;

- a) seriously spoil their enjoyment of the book
- and
- b) promote a feeling of failure

#### **7. How can I help my child if a word cannot be sounded out?**

If your child tries to sound out a word that cannot be sounded, for example "were" explain that it can't be sounded out and either give them the word or give them the initial sound and go back to the beginning of the sentence for another try.

#### **8. My child often wants to read other books instead of their school reading book. But I am worried that this may confuse them.**

When children start to bring home books from school to learn to read there is a tendency for us to think that we should just concentrate on that one book, please don't. Reading books provided by the school have normally been specifically written to introduce sounds gradually and build up a vocabulary by repetition. However, you are often presenting a book to a child, for example, which reads along the lines of, "Jip the dog and Sam the cat see a ball (Page 1), Jip the dog sees a rat (page 2). Your child

may be motivated by their success in learning to read those words, however such repetitive text is hardly likely to stimulate their love of reading and make them thirst to find out what Jip sees next! This is particularly true if they are older children who are struggling with learning to read\*. And our most important aim, as parents, is to foster a love of reading and turn our children into willing readers. Therefore make sure that your child has access to “Real” books and that you continue to share and read books to them that they will enjoy.

\* Older children who are experiencing difficulty with learning to read need books that are at their interest level but are at a younger reading age. It is unfortunate that publishers do not produce many books like this. I have seen older children in schools do anything rather than let their friends witness them with a book that they regard as a “baby’s book.” They will only go to the library to change it when there is no one else there and they will regularly “lose it” rather than be seen with it. I know that it is different when they are at home with you but think of what has already happened to their self-esteem. That is why parents and schools should ensure that these children have access to “Real” books in addition to reading scheme books rather than solely to the latter.

**11. My child prefers non-fiction books but they all seem too difficult for him to read.**

Often non-fiction books use more complex language than your child is used to. It would help for you to read the chapters or sections to them. Also look for books with interesting photos and labelled diagrams, ones that break the pages into small sections of information. Some publishers are producing non-fiction with a low reading age so ask your local librarian or teacher to advise you about these.