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Learning to read: how to help

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It's amazing to think that a three-year-old who doesn't even recognise their own name will be able to read a book alone by the age of six.

*But children don't pick up reading skills alone; they not only need the help of their teacher, they need **your** help to make sure that reading is a pleasure and an easy task rather than a struggle.*

We've lined up expert tips to help your child build on what they learn at school; they may seem common sense and indeed they are, but they are the key to your child's fluent reading.

• **Make use of the library**

Taking your child to the library as a regular feature of their week will help them to involve reading in their life.

Their eye may be caught by a new book they are desperate to try and read, and there is a chance to steer them towards classics you loved from your own childhood. Just pitch them at the right age, there is little more discouraging than not being able to read every second word.

• **Read together at a regular, quiet time**

It's better for you and your child to read together for 15 minutes a day than to leave it to the weekend, even if you can pack in a whole hour then.

Reading a little bit every day will help new words and pronunciations work their way into your child's head in a way that weekly sessions will not.

Make sure you can find a quiet space to read together, the television needs to be off and if possible you need to set thoughts of dinner or bedtime aside while you read together.

• **Remember it should be fun**

If your child doesn't want to read, then don't worry about making them pick up a book every day. Of course, you want to spend some time reading together, and hopefully you can hit on subject matter that will engage your child and make them want to read.

But piling on the pressure will only turn a disinterested child even further away from his books. Think about other ways of engaging a child; a book with more pictures, maybe even a comic, it's the fact that they are reading more than what they are actually reading that is important.

• **Don't correct every mistake**

If your child makes a mistake, don't immediately interrupt, they may realise and correct themselves.

If they really get stuck on a word, help them out so they can continue with the sentence, and hopefully have a sense of achievement when they make it to the end. Praise them when they do well, anything new that they learn deserves it!

Remember to use letter sounds rather than how a letter is named in the alphabet if sounding out words, e.g. cat should be spelled out *cuh ah tuh* rather than *see ay tee*, to make it easier to work out what the word should be.

• **Talk about the book as well as reading it**

You don't just want your child to get to the end of the book by rote, you want them to have understood what they have read as well.

Talk about what happened in the book, whether the main character is likely to be happy by the end, what part of the book they like the best.

• **Work with the school**

The school will have their own reading methods and if you can adopt these, it will make it easier for your child to learn.

Find out from the teacher as much as possible about how the children are taught and if your child has a homework diary or

something similar, use this to record the work you have done at home and ask any questions you need help with.

Don't feel you alone are teaching your child to read, it is a team effort and the teacher should be just as pleased to know you are supporting his/her work as you are with your child's progress.

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