

# Reading

## What is reading?



Reading is the ability to decode written symbols and signs, understand the meaning of words and coordinating these skills together in order to read fluently.

## Why is reading important?

Reading is an important skill needed to achieve academic success at school and university, but it is also important in daily life for negotiating the environment, for relaxation and for self regulation. A lot of information available to us is in written form (e.g. newspapers, books, internet articles, signs). In order to have access to this information a person needs to be able to read. Reading also aids in the development of language, as it exposes children to new vocabulary and deepens their understanding of the structure of language. It opens up a world of information to a child including factual and fictional information and ideas.

Reading can also develop a child's social skills. For example, being read to by an adult or older sibling or even reading to a younger child is a shared experience and can strengthen relationships. In addition, other activities which facilitate social interaction include talking about books together and sharing information with peers, listening to stories within group times and discussing aspects of the stories.

## **What are the building blocks necessary to develop reading?**

- **Hearing** to hear the difference between sounds and to be able to blend sounds together.
- **Phonological awareness skills:** The awareness of what sounds are and how they come together to make words. Skills include the ability to rhyme, segment words into syllables and single sounds, blend sounds together, identify sounds in different positions in words and manipulate sounds within words.
- **Oral language skills:** This includes a child's understanding and use of language and their abilities to describe, give instructions and tell stories as well as their vocabulary knowledge.
- **Print awareness:** Understanding that symbols, pictures and letters have meaning and also comprehending how books work.

## **How can you tell if my child has problems with reading?**

If a child has difficulties with reading they might:

- Have difficulty decoding unfamiliar words.
- Read in a slow, laboured or dysfluent manner when reading age-appropriate paragraphs or stories.
- Have difficulty understanding what they are reading.
- Have difficulty spelling words.
- Have difficulty retaining learnt spelling words from week to week.
- Have difficulty learning and accessing the curriculum at school.
- Lack motivation to participate within reading and writing activities.
- Present with low self esteem related to academic difficulties.

## What other problems can occur when a child has reading difficulties?

When a child has reading difficulties they might also have difficulties with:

- **Literacy:** Spelling and writing.
- **Attention and concentration:** Sustained effort, doing activities without distraction and being able to hold that effort long enough to get the task done.
- **Behaviour:** Their actions usually in relation to their environment or task demands.
- **Auditory Processing:** The ability to hear sounds, distinguish between similar sounds or words, and separate relevant speech from background noise.
- **Receptive (understanding) Language:** Comprehending language.
- **Expressive (using) language:** The use of language through speech, sign or alternative forms of communication to communicate wants, needs, thoughts and ideas.
- **Vocabulary:** The variety of words used in the English language.
- **Articulation:** Clarity of speech sounds and spoken language.
- **Completing academic work** (e.g. the child may fail to meet the expectations and requirements of tasks due to their inability to accurately read and comprehend written instructions e.g. maths tasks often initially require the student to read a problem to determine what the required maths equation).
- **Completing activities:** Effectively completing activities that are accompanied with written rules/instructions (e.g. board games, building a model).
- **Planning and sequencing:** The sequential multi-step task/activity performance to achieve a well-defined end result that follows reading.
- **Sensory processing:** Accurate registration, interpretation and response to sensory stimulation in the environment and one's own body.
- **Working memory:** The ability to temporarily retain and manipulate information involved in language comprehension, reasoning, and learning new information; and to update this information as change occurs.

## What can be done to improve reading skills?

- **Phonological awareness:** Determine whether the foundation skills such as phonological awareness are intact and focus on developing these skills.
- **Work collaboratively** with preschool/school staff to set up joint communication goals and develop strategies to help support the child within the classroom setting.
- **Reading time:** Set aside a regular time to read to and with the child every day.
- **Reading materials:** Provide a range of reading materials around the house to encourage the child to read (e.g. letters, newspapers, magazines, comics, picture books). Place items in the lounge room, in the bedroom and even in the bathroom.
- **Family reading:** Set aside a regular time for the whole family to sit down and read together.
- **Everyday activities:** Encourage the child to read material in everyday situations (e.g. recipes for cooking, signs they can see when in the car, directions for games).
- **Visit the library:** This will encourage the child to read more and they will be able to access a wide range of reading materials. Also, the library may offer reading programs which may further increase the child's interest in reading.
- **Electronic programs:** Enhance your child's joy of reading by utilising other activities, such as books on tape, using programs on the computer (e.g. Reading Doctor, Reading Eggs) or the iPad.

## What activities can help improve reading abilities?

### For the pre-school child and early reader:

- **Listen to sounds** in the environment, songs, stories, words and speech sounds.
- **Look at books** together from an early age.
- **Make sounds:** Talk about how sounds are made with your mouth and practice making different sounds in front of the mirror (e.g. a snake

makes a “sssss” sound).

- **Read books** together, which have an emphasis on sound play (e.g. rhyme, alliteration, or words that start with the same sound).
- **Identify sounds in words.** For example, talk about the sound at the start of words: ‘Listen, mummy starts with a /m/ sound. Let’s find more words that start with a /m/ sound’.
- **‘I Spy’:** Play games like ‘I Spy’ and take turns to find objects that begin with a specific sound (e.g. ‘I spy with my little eye something beginning with /t/).
- **Sing songs** together as they often contain rhyming or alliteration.
- **Alphabet:** Look at alphabet books and sing alphabet songs, put alphabet posters in the child’s room.
- **Clap or drum out syllables** in words (e.g. ‘butterfly’: but - ter -fly).
- **Poems:** Make up silly poems together.
- **Label pictures** that the child draws.
- **Shopping:** Make up grocery lists together, write the word and draw a simple picture next to it.
- **Letter Awareness:** Expose the child to letters and numbers as often as you can through books, newspapers, magazines, signs in the environment.
- **Choose books to read** that the child is interested in so that the activity is fun for the child (e.g. if they love cars, choose a book about cars; if they like to lift flaps, choose books that have pull tags).
- **Ask questions** about what is happening in stories and what might happen next.
- **Vocabulary:** Explain any unfamiliar vocabulary and try to re-use any new words again within daily activities. The more times the child hears a word, the more likely they are to learn it and to begin using that word.

## **For the early school age child:**

- **Listen to the child read.** Notice how they are reading and choose books appropriate to their reading level.
- **Take turns reading aloud.** Begin with the child only reading a small section (and the adult reading the rest) and then increase the amount as they get more confident.
- **Sound out words:** Help the child when they get stuck on a word. Help

them to use what they know about letters to sound out the word. Alternatively, ask them to skip the word and read the whole sentence and then think about what word might go in the sentence or provide them with the word with which they are having difficulty.

- **Send letters** and notes to the child to read and encourage the child to send letters/notes to you, other family members or friends.
- **Rhymes:** Use rhymes such as “When two vowels go walking, the first one does the talking” to help the child apply spelling rules to their reading.
- **Spelling Rules:** Teach the child specific spelling rules to apply to their reading (e.g. the silent ‘e’ rule (also known as the magic ‘e’ or the bossy ‘e’) changes a short vowel into a long vowel (e.g. cap versus cape).

## **For the older child:**

- **Use a variety of books:** Expose the child to a variety of books and reading materials (e.g. factual, fantasy, folk law, fiction, funny tales, dramatic tales).
- **Read aloud** and continue to share books. Explain new vocabulary and concepts that you come across.
- **Create opportunities** for the child to read and write stories, lists, messages, letters, notes and postcards to relatives and friends. The child’s skills and proficiency in reading will be strengthened if you help them connect reading to writing and writing to reading.
- **Make up a story** together and then illustrate the story.
- **Personal dictionary:** Encourage the child to write down new words they have learned and to write what they mean.
- **Journal:** Start a journal or a diary to describe a few things that have happened during the day.

## **Improving fluency of reading:**

- **Model** fluent reading to the child with a variety of reading materials (e.g. newspaper, fiction, non-fiction, poems and recipes). After listening to an adult read fluently and with expression, talk about exactly what it was that made it ‘good reading’.

- **Repetition:** Practice reading fluently by reading the same passage, poem or song lyrics several times to help develop expression and fluency.
- **Read aloud:** Ask the child to 'echo' or repeat the sentence back to you in the same way that you read it.

## **Why should I seek therapy if I notice difficulties with reading in my child?**

Therapeutic intervention to help a child with reading difficulties is important to:

- Develop a child's phonological awareness skills to aid in reading.
- Help a child read words which are unfamiliar using strategies such as sounding out words, blending sounds and syllable awareness.
- Help a child read words which are unfamiliar using appropriate spelling 'rules'.
- Improve a child's ability to recognise and read sight words.
- Improve a child's reading comprehension.
- Help a child read fluently and use punctuation appropriately.
- Develop a child's confidence and self esteem.
- Some children who have reading difficulties require explicit teaching of foundation skills needed for reading (e.g. phonological awareness) and/or appropriate spelling 'rules'.

## **If left untreated what can difficulties with reading lead to?**

When children have difficulties with reading, they might also have difficulties with:

- Poor self esteem and reduced confidence.
- Completing forms accurately (e.g. lunch orders).
- Completing assessment tasks or projects where they are required to read and interpret the task.
- Completing and following through with tasks that require the ability to follow written instructions (e.g. traveling directions, recipes, assembling furniture, taking medication).
- Reading signs.

- Reading maps.

## **What type of therapy is recommended for reading difficulties?**

If your child has difficulties with reading, it is recommended they consult a Speech Therapist.

If there are multiple areas of concern (i.e. beyond just reading) both Occupational Therapy and Speech Therapy may well be recommended to address the functional areas of concern. This is the benefit of choosing Kid Sense which provides both Occupational Therapy and Speech Therapy.

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