

How to Help Your Child With Reading



The Importance of Reading

Reading is one of the most important skills that your child will ever learn. Once it has been mastered it opens up a whole world of information and experiences. If it is not mastered effectively it damages children's life chances. There are two interrelated skills that readers need to be able to use – decoding and comprehension. It is important that all readers have the skills to break down (decode) new words. At school, this is taught through a combination of phonics (correspondence between letters and sounds) and key word recognition. However, children need to be able to do more than “bark at text”. They also need to be able to understand what they have read and make links between different texts and between a text and their own experiences.

Decoding

Very often, this is the area that parents are most concerned about and what people are referring to when they talk about “reading”. Decoding is the process of reading the words on the page, using what you know about the correspondence between letters and sounds. However, English is not a phonetically regular language and children also need to develop a bank of sight words (sometimes called “key words”) that cannot be decoded using letter sounds. (Some key words need to be learnt by sight early on but can be decoded as a child's knowledge of phonics develops, for example “same, cake, there”.) The aim of teaching decoding skills is for children to be able to read quickly with expression. Good decoding skills are necessary for readers to be able to understand what they have read, which is the purpose of reading. This purpose can sometimes be forgotten as children's decoding skills improve.

Comprehension Skills

Comprehension is the ability to ask and answer questions about what has been read, and to make links to other books and experiences. This skill often gets overlooked in the focus on being able to “read” what is put in front of you.

However, the importance of understanding what has been read cannot be overstated. The best way to develop comprehension skills is to talk over a text after it has been read – practise retelling the events, answer questions about the use of words in the text, talk about how the information was presented and why. A list of possible questions to ask is included at the back of this leaflet. However, you do not need to spend a lot of time talking about each text after you have read it – questions spread out during the reading will be more effective, and “little and often” is better than spoiling the experience of reading by over-analysing the text.

Alternative decoding strategies

Phonics is the Government’s recommended strategy for teaching reading. However, there are also other strategies that can be used to help your child read texts. Looking at the pictures for clues is a strategy that children in the early stages of reading can rely on, although they should also be encouraged to point at the words and use their developing knowledge of phonics so that they are reading the words and not telling the story or information. As children get more confident with their use of letter sounds and their knowledge of key words they can be encouraged to leave a gap and read the rest of the sentence, before returning to the text to see if the sentence has helped them to work out the missing word. However they will need to make sure that they do reread the sentence and work out the missing word otherwise their comprehension may suffer using this strategy. Sometimes, the context of the word can help them to work out what it says, for example “whispered” following a set of speech marks, or a subject specific word in an information text. However, the primary method for decoding texts should continue to be the use of phonics.

Memorising text

As children become more familiar with a text it may seem that they are memorising the words rather than reading them. This is a normal phase of reading and the beginning of reading for enjoyment. In the very early stages of reading it is worth reminding children going through this phase to point at each word to help their understanding of 1:1 correspondence (the link between letters on a page and words). When children find a text they enjoy reading they will read it over and over again, just like adults. As long as they are getting a balanced reading diet there is nothing wrong with this.

A Balanced Reading Diet

To be a good reader, children need to have experience of a wide variety of different texts. Broadly, this means that they have read fiction, non-fiction and poetry. However, within "fiction" there are many different types of stories – adventure, mystery, fantasy, science fiction, historical... Similarly within "non-fiction" children need to have read different text types – reports, recounts, explanations, information texts... Some of these text types can be read through the school reading scheme, and all will be looked at in detail during your child's time at Hyde, but they also need to be seen in your child's choice of reading outside of school. This could be through their choice of books at the library or through the comics and magazines that they choose to read. It could even be through the choice of books that are shared at bedtime. There is nothing wrong with your child reading all the information available on sharks, for example, but have they also read stories and poems about sharks? Following your child's interests is a great way of encouraging their reading.

Similarly, children need to read books at a variety of difficulty levels. Books that are too difficult for them are perfect for sharing together and practising decoding skills. However, children also need to be able to read books fluently. This may be a book they have read many times before but love, or a new book where they want to read on their own. This "reading for enjoyment" provides children with a feeling of success and confidence in their skills and is vitally important to the development of a confident reader.

Using reading diaries

Reading diaries provide a way for school and home to communicate about how your child is getting on with their reading. It is helpful if when anyone hears your child read they record the date, the title of the book, the pages that were read (you do not have to finish the book every time!) and a comment about how they managed the reading and anything they had problems with. It can also be helpful to record any words or spelling patterns that your child has had difficulty with so that these can be reinforced.

The importance of sharing books

Sharing books with your child is a great way to encourage them to read. Children like to copy their parents, and if they can see you reading and sharing books with them they will want to read and share books with you. It is also a good way to introduce them to different types of books and check that they have understood what they have read or heard. Bedtime stories are the traditional way of sharing books, but books can be shared at any time and in any place. It does not have to take a long time, either – ten minutes a day sharing books and reading the reading scheme book will have a noticeable impact on your child's enjoyment of reading, their decoding skills and their comprehension.

What should my child be reading?

There is no set list of what your child should be reading. They will have a reading book from the school scheme but this is not the only measure of a good reader. Environmental print, for example, street and shop names, newspaper headlines, is also important, as is a variety of different text types, both that can be easily decoded and that are slightly above your child's current reading level so that you can read them together and practise decoding. However, it is also important to develop a sense of reading for pleasure and of reading to find things out, either how the story ends, how words have been used to create impact or the answer to a question that your child has come up with about a particular topic. Children could also be reading comics, magazines, cereal boxes, leaflets about their clubs and activities, menus in restaurants or cafés – the list is quite literally endless! It is important to remember, however, that reading is supposed to be fun – being forced to read something that is not interesting or relevant can put children off reading, which is the exact opposite of what we are trying to do!

Reading with expression

Reading is not just “barking at text”. One of the skills children need to learn is to make their reading of text interesting by varying their tone of voice. Their reading needs to be fluent, but not rushed when they are reading aloud – they need to remember that the person listening needs to be able to hear and understand the individual words. Your child also needs experience at taking into account punctuation, pausing at full stops and commas and using exclamation marks to change their tone of voice. Another important part of reading with expression is to take account of how characters speak – is their speech shouted, whispered, cried? Your child might also want to experiment with different voices for different characters.

Reading at school

In Class One we recognise the importance of reading. Our ideal is to hear each child read at least twice a week – once individually, by the class teacher or teaching assistant, and once as part of Group Reading, where children of a similar reading ability look at the same text and focus on targeted aspects of reading. However, there will be some times when we are unable to meet this ideal due to the busy nature of school life. If this occurs we will try to hear your child read more on a future occasion.

We are also lucky enough to have volunteers who come into school to hear individual readers. When your child has been heard to read at school the name of the book and the initials of the person who read with them will be written into their reading diary, as well as a brief comment on how they have done, if appropriate.

The Reading Books at Hyde

The reading books at Hyde are divided into colours. Within each colour are a variety of different story, poetry and information books. The books within each band cover a range of difficulty levels, with some being easier to decode and others being more complex. Children who are just starting to read will be given books with no words so they can practise telling stories using the pictures and begin to get use to story conventions (for example, the structure of a story, characters, setting). Children will be able to change their books everyday as they get more confident at reading. They will be reminded to do this as they come into the classroom, however it will be their responsibility to ensure that it is done. Children at the early stages of reading will have to share their book with an adult at school before it is changed so that we can ensure that they are using the best strategies to decode words.

When will my child move up the reading bands?

The decision to move your child to the next book band will be informed by a number of factors and made by the class teacher. It will take account of both their decoding skills and their comprehension skills, as well as their attitudes as a reader and the range of texts they have read. It is not enough for children to be able to read the texts fluently, although this will be a big factor in the decision to move your child through the book bands. Most importantly, moving quickly through the book bands does not necessarily mean that your child will be a good reader as reading is made up of a variety of different interrelated skills.

When should I worry about my child's reading?

All children develop the skills for reading at different rates. They will be taught decoding skills in groups with children working on the same sounds in a daily phonics lesson. Comprehension skills will be taught during group reading. Most children progress quickly with these regular sessions. However, some children find the combination of letters and sounds confusing and take longer to develop the necessary skills. By the end of Reception, children should be able to use their knowledge of letters and sounds to read words and sentences with a growing knowledge of key words. By the end of Year One children should be reading an increasing number of texts with confidence and fluency, answering questions about what they have read where the answers are obvious. By the end of Year Two children should be reading a variety of longer and more complex texts and answering questions where the answers are not obvious in what they have read. If you are worried about your child's reading please come and see Mrs Close or Mrs Stride.

Types of fiction/non-fiction (including definitions)

Fiction:

Fantasy – stories that are set in different worlds or have a magical theme

Science Fiction – stories about technology or space

Historical – stories set in the past, sometimes containing historical people

Adventure – stories involving a quest or journey

Traditional tales – stories that have been used to teach children about values and correct behaviour

Stories from other cultures – stories from around the world

Fairy tales – stories involving magical characters and events

Non-fiction:

Information texts – texts where information is ordered under headings and subheadings

Explanations – texts which tell us how or why something happens

Recounts – retelling events that have occurred

Non-chronological reports – texts that describe or classify something

Flow diagram – labelled diagrams showing how something occurs

Poetry:

Nursery rhymes – traditional rhymes

Poems with repeated language – poems with either words or phrases that are repeated to create an effect

Nonsense poems – poems that are about a made up subject or use made up words