

Choose Reading #1

Find the right time and place to read...

Making sure that your child is being offered the best possible conditions for reading can have a big effect on whether they start seeing reading as something they choose to do. Reading is hard work for lots of children, particularly if they are tired, find it hard to concentrate, or are lacking in self-confidence.

1

Show your child that reading can be a comfortable and relaxing thing to do by helping them to choose a special space where you can share books together. This could be as simple as sitting on the sofa together with a blanket for reading time, or lying on your tummies on the floor with some comfy cushions. You could also make a special reading space or den somewhere in the home, invite them to bring a few of their soft toys to come and share in story time with you.



2

Think about timing. Try not to make reading feel like it has time pressure or a limit to it. This can give your child the feeling that reading isn't a fun or relaxing thing to do. Instead, you could try sharing books before dinner time, or before they go to bed, and of course there's nothing more relaxing than sharing a bedtime story with children of all ages.

3

Have books available in different places in the house, not just their bedroom. Children are more likely to pick up a book if they can see it. It's also very helpful to think about matching the type of book to the time you are reading. For example, interactive books with lots of flaps to lift or puzzles to solve can be great to share when your child has more energy, whereas the gentle sounds of a rhyming story might be just the thing to help your child wind down before bed.

Share different types of books...

As children learn to read, they are also beginning to develop their likes and dislikes when it comes to books. Very often for children who are reluctant to read, it might be that they have not yet found the right kind of book for them. If you can find the type of book that helps spark their curiosity and discover the joy in reading, you will be one step closer to supporting them to become lifelong readers.

1

It's important that children have someone to support them in finding out who they are as a reader, and they will need to be exposed to a wide range of books and texts to discover this for themselves. Luckily, there has never been a better time for the variety and range of engaging children's books being published to suit every child's need. Spend time talking to your child about the kind of books or magazines they could be reading.

2

We often think that children should only be reading traditional chapter books (sometimes the thicker the better) and we tend to focus on fiction, but there is so much more out there. It can also be easy to let our own childhood taste in books affect how we talk to children about what they like. Remember that the world is rapidly changing and so is the world of children's books. Graphic novels, non-fiction texts, diaries, magazine subscriptions, puzzle books, interactive books, joke books and poetry can open up many more opportunities for enjoying reading together and there is a lot out there to be explored.

3

If your child is learning to read using phonics reading scheme books, this doesn't mean that you can't share other material with them. Often children can be put off by a book which they have no interest in. Don't feel you have to buy lots of expensive books either. Sign up for free at your local library so children can choose new books regularly, swap books with friends or have a look for some bargains in charity shops.



Read aloud...

It is a common misconception that when children reach a certain age, or can read fluently by themselves, we should encourage them to only read independently. Although developing the skill to read independently is important, this doesn't mean that we should stop reading aloud to children too! In fact, continuing to do this really helps children become better readers by hearing a good model of reading from an adult.

1

Listening to you reading aloud, your child is free to imagine the story for themselves and visualise what is happening, rather than having to worry about reading the words themselves. If you find that your child is reluctant to let you read aloud to them, don't give up. Keep suggesting it and hopefully you'll catch them at the right time. It's also fine if they aren't 100% focussed while you're reading.

2

If they want to sit close to you and look at the pictures and words that's great, but if they would rather be doing something else while you're reading, like drawing or playing, this doesn't mean they're not actually listening and engaged. Try and tempt them with a new book or ask them if they'd like to choose a book for you to look at together. Make the book sound exciting and get their attention by pointing out something about the front cover. For example, "Oh wow! Let's have a look at these pictures together!", "Shall we find out some facts in this book?", or "Look at this monster! Shall we find out what's inside?"

3

Apart from all the ways that reading aloud can help develop your child's reading skills, it can also have a profound effect on their wellbeing. Even if it's only for 10-15 minutes a day, during this bonding time you share an emotional connection with your child, free from any other distractions where you can both focus fully on the book you're sharing together.



Chat about the books you are sharing...

Talking about the books you share with your child is equally as important as reading aloud and listening to them read to you. Chatting with your child can tell you a great deal about how much your child is enjoying the book, how much of the text they are accessing and what they really think.

1 When you talk about the characters, settings, pictures, facts, or anything else you might find in the book, you are actively involving your child in the act of reading and helping them to become more engaged. Through these informal conversations, they can tell you what they think, ask you questions, and you can focus on what they are most interested in. Most importantly, it builds and strengthens the connection between you, your child and the book you are sharing.

2 Be careful to not put any pressure on these conversations and avoid too many questions which only check their understanding. This can feel like a test and can put children off if they feel they don't know the correct answer. Instead, think of ways to connect your child to what's happening in the book and spend lots of time talking about the book before reading it. By talking about the characters, settings or topics they might find out about before they start the book, you are giving them extra confidence and setting them up to succeed. Ask them lots of open-ended questions and share what you feel or think about the book too.

3 Use the pictures to play games, asking them to spot certain things on different pages or point out things they like. While talking about what's happening in the book, use this as an opportunity to explain some of the trickier words or concepts to them and try dropping in some higher-level vocabulary to extend their understanding. Always be guided by your child and don't worry if you feel the conversation has moved away from the book. You can take your time and find a way of bringing your child back to the book.



Look for words all around you...

Remember that reading doesn't have to be limited to sharing books with your child. Although we know this is a brilliant way to show children the pleasure you can find in reading, there are lots of other ways to incorporate reading into your daily routine.

1

Think about all the things you need to read to find things out. Why not ask your child to help you read a message on your phone? Or see if they can read signs in the street while you're out for a walk. Make this into a game of 'I Spy' and see if they can spot any common words. What are the names of the shops you go into? Ask them to look at food items in the supermarket and help you read the ingredients. Later, find a recipe in a book or online that they could help read with you while cooking a meal.

2

If your child is into sport, you could look up results together and talk about them. You could even look at the daily news. Use a child-friendly website like CBBC's Newsround and find out together what the top news stories are that day. Again, be guided by your child's interest and find something which appeals to them.

3

The more you get children to start connecting the words they see around with the sound of the word, the more interest they will have in being able to read it for themselves. If children see that reading can be something that helps you to learn how to do more things or find out more interesting stuff, they are more likely to start seeing the benefits of putting in the work required.



Communicate with your child's school...

It's important to keep up all the positive reading habits you have been building with your child, even if they become reluctant at times. You can share any phonics or reading scheme books your child brings home from school in a fun way while supporting them with learning to read.

1

Make sure that your child is still encouraged to choose books they want to read alongside school requirements. Remember you are not expecting your child to be able to decode every book they choose and you can get a great deal out of any book by reading to them, sharing the reading and talking about the pictures.

2

Children are supported best when all the adults around them are working together towards the same goal. Make sure that you have a good line of communication with your child's teacher around their reading. It's likely that they will see a different attitude or approach to reading from your child compared to what you see at home, so be open and honest about what you notice. When possible, attend any reading activities or workshops your child's school offers to parents. By doing this, you will be able to learn more about how your child is learning to read in school and how to better support them at home.

3

Remember that you play a valuable and crucial part in helping your child to become a reader. Model good reading habits to your child and show them the value in learning to read. The most important thing you can do is to help your child feel supported, relaxed and happy and ultimately encourage them to choose reading.

