

Simple advice on helping your child to read...

During the first years at primary school, children get to grips with the basics of reading. Your main role as parents is to make the most of regular opportunities for practising reading outside school. Of course it is really important we make sure that reading is a fun activity our children want to do.

Reading to our children – even when children are starting to read some books on their own, it's really important to keep reading to them, just as you always have - with a cuddle and with no pressure to perform. As they struggle with some of the hard parts of learning to read it's easy for them to forget that books are an enjoyable part of life. Bedtime stories remind everyone of this. Hearing you read aloud with expression provides a model. Reading books above the child's ability helps to broaden their vocabulary.

Home reading practice – the school will send home books for children to practise reading. Your input here is absolutely essential! Like all new skills, the more you practise, the quicker the skill is learned. If your child is reluctant, suggest that you start the story off, or that you read every other page. Help your child understand this is a joint enterprise and not a test! Ten minutes a day (rather than half an hour twice a week), is perfect – any more and your child might get turned off.

Focus on meaning – at school a lot of attention is given to letter sounds and word-level skills in the early stages of reading. Home is the perfect place to focus on what a book is about. Talk about the pictures, what might happen next, the characters and how they feel. Make links with other stories or programmes your child has enjoyed.

Words all around us - your child will have certain letters, sounds or 'tricky' words to practise reading at home. This can be turned into a game. Can they find those letters or words on a cereal box? On the pages of a favourite story? In family names? On signs in the local area, such as the playground? Don't forget, reading is not just about books but obtaining information from the world around.

Scrapbooks – would your child like to make a scrapbook of real football headlines with photos of the players alongside? Or favourite character pictures and story titles? Children will return to this kind of interest-led scrapbook many times, perfecting their reading skills as they do so!

Golden Rules

Getting the balance right between making reading fun and keeping up regular short bursts of reading practice can be tricky at times. Here are some dos and don'ts to help you out.

DO keep reading to your child, in addition to reading practise. It will help them to remember how interesting and enjoyable books are, and will keep them motivated to want to read themselves.

DO your best to stick to a ritual of ten minutes reading practise, most days each week. It doesn't always have to be with a book – it could be a game such as looking for the letter 'p' around the house.

DON'T point out every mistake your child is making. Children need encouragement and positive reinforcement to be confident. A confident child makes a better learner.

DO praise your child's efforts, even if you think they are not trying their best tonight. Learning to read is a tiring and lengthy business. It is really important to keep your child motivated.

DO stop to look at the pictures and talk about them. Your child's teacher won't always have time to linger over things like this but pictures are a huge part of a book's attraction for children.

DO give your child opportunities to read things they already know by heart – jokes, song lyrics, birthday card messages or simple books for younger siblings.

DON'T forget how important your input and attention is – just a little and often will help your child to want to learn to read and to understand how important you think reading is.

