

What can I do at home to help my child read?

UNCRC Article 29 (goals of education)
Education must develop every child's personality, talents and abilities to the full.

"Reading transforms the human brain which transforms the mind, which transforms the life of every reader."
Maryanne Wolf, neuroscientist and reading specialist

Talk to your child.

Oral language is the foundation for reading. Listening and speaking are a child's first introduction to language. Talking and singing teach your child the sounds of language, making it easier for him or her to learn how to read.

Here are some things you can do to help your child build an appreciation for words and language:

- Tell family stories about yourself, your child's grandparents, and other relatives.
- Talk to your child as much as possible about things you are doing and thinking.
- Ask your child lots of questions.
- Encourage your child to tell you what he or she thinks or feels.
- Ask your child to tell you about his or her day – about activities and games played.
- Be patient! Give your child time to find the words he or she wants to use.
- Sing songs, such as the alphabet song, and recite nursery rhymes, encouraging your child to join in.
- Play rhyming and riddle games.

Make reading fun.

Reading aloud can be a lot of fun, not just for parents but for all family members. Here are some ways to get the most out of reading to your young child:

- Read with drama and excitement! Use different voices for different characters in the story. Use your child's name instead of a character's name. Make puppets and use them to act out a story.
- Re-read your child's favourite stories as many times as your child wants to hear them, and choose books and authors that your child enjoys.
- Read stories that have repetitive parts and encourage your child to join in.
- Point to words as you read them. This will help your child make a connection between the words he or she hears you say and the words on the page.
- Read all kinds of material – stories, poems, information books, magazine and newspaper articles, and comics.
- Encourage relatives and friends to give your child books as gifts.
- Take your child to the library and look at interactive CD-ROMs and the Internet, as well as books.
- Subscribe to a magazine for your child. He or she will love receiving mail!

The more you enjoy the reading experience, the more your child will enjoy it.

Children love routine, and reading is something that you and your child can look forward to every day. By taking the time to read with your child, you show him or her that reading is important and fun to do.

Try to read with your child as often as possible. It's the best thing you can do to help him or her learn at school! It also allows you to spend time together in an enjoyable way and to build a strong and healthy relationship.

- Start reading with your child when he or she is very young.
- Set aside a special time each day when you can give your full attention to reading with your child.
- Choose a comfortable spot to read, where you can be close to your child. Make it your "reading place"! Set

aside a special shelf in that area for your child's books.
- Choose a variety of books.
- Vary the length of reading time according to your child's age and interests. For young children, several short sessions (of 10 minutes each) may be better than one long session (of 30 minutes).
- Read slowly so that your child can form a mental picture of what is happening in the story.
- Praise your child for his or her ideas and participation!
- When you and your child are away from home, take along books, magazines, and books-on-tape for your child to read and listen to.
- Keep reading to your child even after he or she has learned to read. By reading stories that will interest your child but that are above his or her reading level, you can stretch your child's understanding and keep alive the magic of shared reading.

Set an example

As a parent, you are your child's most important role model. If your child sees you reading, especially for pleasure or information, he or she will understand that reading is a worthwhile activity.

You can also share many daily reading activities with your child. Here are some ideas:

- Read recipes, food labels, schedules, maps, instructions, and brochures.
- Read traffic signs and signs in stores and restaurants.
- Look up information in cookbooks, manuals, phone books, atlases, and dictionaries.
- Read greeting cards, letters, and e-mail messages to and from relatives and friends.

Talk about books

Talking about the books you read is just as important as reading them. Discussing a story or a book with your child helps your child understand it and connect it to his or her own experience of life. It also helps enrich your child's vocabulary with new words and phrases.

Here are some ways to help your child acquire skills in comprehension, reasoning, and critical thinking:

- Ask your child about the kinds of books he or she would like to read.
- Talk to your child about your favourite books from childhood, and offer to read them.
- Encourage your child to ask questions and to comment on the story and pictures in a book – before, during, and after reading it.
- Look at the cover and the title of a book with your child, and ask your child what he or she thinks might happen in the story.
- Encourage your child to think critically about the story. Does he or she agree or disagree with the author? Why?
- Think out loud about the story as you read, and encourage your child to do the same. For example, ask, "Does this make sense? Why or why not?"
- Give your child time to think about the story, and then ask him or her about it again a few days later.

Listen to your child read

As your child learns to read, listen to him or her read aloud. Reading to you gives your child a chance to practise and to improve his or her reading skills.

As you listen to your child, remember that your reactions are important. Above all, listen without interrupting. Be enthusiastic and praise your child as often as you can. If possible, be specific with your praise so that your child knows what he or she is doing well.

- Show your child that you are enjoying the story by indicating interest and by asking questions.
- Give your child time to figure out tricky words, and show your child how he or she can learn from mistakes.
- Try to have your child read aloud to you at times when there will be no interruptions.

- Make sure that your child selects books that aren't too difficult. Don't worry if the books your child chooses are a little easier than the ones he or she reads at school.
- Encourage your child to "listen" to his or her own reading. Listening will help him or her hear mistakes and try to fix them.
- Take turns reading with your child, especially if he or she is just beginning to read, or try reading together.
- Talk about a story after your child has read it, to make sure that he or she understands it.

Show you value your child's efforts

Remember, your child needs to know that you value his or her efforts. Children learn to read over time, with lots of practice and support from parents and teachers.

Here are some ways you can show your child that you have confidence in his or her ability to learn:

- Be aware of your child's reading level, but use that information in a positive way. Choose books and activities that are at the right level and that will help your child improve his or her reading skills.
- Be patient and flexible in your efforts to help your child.
- Show your child that you see him or her as a growing reader, and praise his or her efforts to learn.

Strategies to help read unknown words

- Talk with children about the book they are reading. What is it about? Do they like it? What has happened so far? What do they think will happen next?
- With younger and less able readers, talk about the pictures. Pictures help children to understand the words.
- With older and more able readers, discuss the characters and the words and phrases used by the author.
- When a child doesn't know a word, ask him or her to try it. You could say: "That is a hard word. Why don't you just make the first sound and then read on. Maybe the right word will pop into your head."
- (This actually works on many occasions.) If the child still doesn't know the word, tell him or her, what it is.
- If a child misreads a word wait until the end of the sentence. (They often self-correct.) Ask, "Does that make sense? Does it sound right?" Have the child reread it. If the child still misreads it, pronounce the word. Then get the child to reread it correctly.
- If the difficult word has a suffix (ing, ment ….) you could say, "Why don't you cover the suffix and then read the word." (This helps children to decode words quickly.)
- Another technique is to jump over the word. The whole sentence is reread with good intonation and correct pace, the problem word is exchanged for the word "something" during the reading. The suggestions made by the child are then discussed. Ask if other clues can be taken from the first few letters of the word; tell the child the word if necessary.
- Phrasing – the child should read in meaningful chunks of information. He/she should read smoothly pausing at full stops and commas; not stop at the end of every line of text; make his/her voice drop in pitch at full stops and raise in pitch at question marks.
- The child should read like he/she speaks ….with expression.
- Although being able to decode words is important, being able to read fluently is also important. It is difficult for the child to understand what they have read if they have to keep stopping to sound out words. All that time and focus on an individual word takes away the attention from understanding the whole story.
- Use lots of praise and encouragement, and avoid criticism. It is important that the children become confident with reading.
- There is a home/school booklet or card to record progress. You can help with this by making notes when you hear a child read. These notes might include the date, the title and the author of the book, how long the reading lasted, how many pages were read and a brief comment about how the child got on.