

Top tips for helping your child with reading

Apart from that nightly bedtime story, what else can you do to make sure your child gets off to a good start, gains independence and enjoys reading?

Take a look at these top tips and try out some of the ideas to see what works well in your home.





Early reading skills

Tip 1: Talk about letters and sounds

If you draw attention to letters and sounds, your child will begin to notice them as well. Knowing the letter sounds is a very important first step in early phonics teaching so start talking about these at the earliest opportunity.

Tip 2: Signs that your child may be ready to begin learning early reading skills

There are no hard and fast rules about this but if your child can do these things then it may be that they are ready to begin learning early reading skills:

- listen to a story and retell bits of it
- recognise some letter sounds (like the first sound in their name)
- recognise his or her own name in writing
- match some words (like Mum) when they see them in different places
- concentrate for 5-10 minutes.





Top tips: age 3-4

At this age you just want to make sure that your child gets off to the best possible start. It's all about sharing and enjoying books as well as introducing some of the very first skills of reading. These top tips outline some practical information and ideas for you!

Reading together

Tip 1: Read together every day

Children need to read little and often, so snuggle up with a book or sit at the screen together at a time that works for you both (or all!). Also try to keep a regular slot each day for a special relaxing reading time if possible – we all need that!

Tip 2: Read everywhere you go

Read on the move and show your child how you read words everywhere you go too. Point out words they might recognise, including signs and logos in the street or on labels.

Tip 3: Find your favourites and add to them

Children love to listen to and read their favourite books over and over again and to remember some parts by heart. That's fine as enjoyment and memory play a key part in learning to read. Add to their list of favourites by reading stories of all kinds, rhymes, poetry and information books too.

Tip 4: All join in

Start asking your child to join in with bits that are repeated in stories, e.g. *'Run run as fast as you can! You can't catch me I'm the gingerbread man!'*. Traditional stories, like The Gingerbread Man, are really good for this and children will love doing the voices!

Tip 5: Talk about books, words and pictures

Before you start reading a book, talk about the title, the pictures on the cover (front and back). Look through the pictures together and ask your child what they think the story might be about.

Tip 6: Talk about stories and events

As you read and when you've finished, sometimes ask questions about the story. *What was your favourite bit? What do you think about that? What would you do?* Get your child to ask you questions too. Don't overdo it though – otherwise you can lose the thread of the plot.





Tip 7: Retell stories

Sometimes after you have shared a story, ask your child to retell it to you. Help by asking *What happened first? What next? And then what?* Can you remember what happens at the end?! Encourage them to use plenty of expression.

Tip 8: Listen to and sing songs and rhymes

Singing lots of songs and nursery rhymes helps your child to hear the sounds in words and build up a bank of known favourites. Play with words and sounds and make up nonsense rhymes in songs or nursery rhymes they know. Encourage them to join in.





Top tips: age 5-6

By this point, your child will probably have had some experience of early reading and will be building up a range of reading skills. Now it's all about gaining more confidence so take a look at these top tips to help you get a good balance of reading for enjoyment and skills practice.

Sharing reading

Tip 1: It's still good to share

Don't give up on talking about picture books and sharing that bedtime story or information book. It's just as important now to enjoy reading these books with your child, as well as those they bring home from school.

Tip 2: Read with expression

Read with expression when reading to your child. Use different voices and vary the volume for effect or for different bits of information such as, *Did you know that the Tyrannosaurus Rex...? Wow! You'll soon see that your child will then try these skills when reading to you!*

Tip 3: Talk about books, words and pictures

Before reading a book together, always talk about the title, the pictures and the information on the cover (front and back). If it's new, ask what your child thinks the book might be about. If it's an old favourite then talk about the bits you love most! Don't worry if some books get chosen again and again!

Tip 4: Retell stories or events

When reading aloud use lots of expression and try different voices for different characters. Get your child to join in with bits too, such as, *'They pulled and they pulled!'* and *'Fee, fi, fo, fom...'*. See if your child can copy you!

Practising early reading skills

Tip 1: Listen to your child read

Books that your child brings home from school should be at the right level for your child. The words should be readable for your child – we say they are levelled reading scheme books. These books are written to ensure steady progress and success. Many of these books include helpful notes for parents inside the front cover.





Tip 2: Sound it out

If your child gets stuck on a word, try phonics first. Get your child to say the letter sounds and say them quickly to try to hear the word; this is called ‘blending’. If the word can’t be sounded out then it’s best if you say it quickly and move on. If the book is at the right level then this should not happen too much.

Tip 3: Clap and chunk

Clapping out syllables or chunks in words and names can help with reading longer words: *Di-no-saur!* *Cho-co-late!* Or point out that some words are made up of two words, so *wind* and then *mill* makes *windmill*.

Tip 4: Try expression and flow

Your child’s expression might sometimes sound stilted on the first read of a sentence or a page. This is because they are focusing on making sounds into words. To keep your child hooked into the story, read it again with expression – after lots of praise, of course!

Tip 5: Don’t be afraid to back track

It’s sometimes good to get your child to re-read a sentence or even a page if it has been tricky to work out. This helps with meaning, flow and confidence – and we all still have to do this sometimes!

Tip 6: Read, read, read!

It’s really important to read as much as possible with your child. Read the books that come home from school, borrow library books, buy books and magazines. Read signs and notices, and find interesting websites to read. And keep reading together at bedtime too!





Top tips: age 6-7

Your child will now be building on those early reading skills and developing confidence in reading more broadly and fluently. These top tips will help you to keep a good balance between reading for enjoyment across a range of interests and developing the skills to help your child read with even more confidence and efficiency.

Sharing reading

Tip 1: It's still good to share

Don't give up on talking about picture books, short chapter books and even sharing bedtime stories and information books with your child. Choose what to read together and exchange views. Sharing a love of reading will rub off on them!

Tip 2: Take the lead

Try reading slightly more difficult books together – you read one page and your child reads the next, or you read the main information and they read the captions. Hearing you read fluently and seeing you read for information will help them to see what reading can be.

Tip 3: Encourage an opinion

Talk about books when you've finished reading together. Talk about the characters and what happens in a story, or what specific bit of information was most useful, but also get them to give you their opinions too. Let them tell you if they don't like a book, and why. It's OK not to like some books or to prefer reading on-screen sometimes!

Tip 4: Make links

As well as talking about the book itself, make links between events or information in the book and your child's own experiences: *'Do you remember when we did that ...?'*. Get them to ask questions too: *'Is that how Grandad does it too?'*.

Practising developing reading skills

Tip 1: It's still important to listen

Your child may be bringing home slightly longer books from school now, but they are still likely to be part of a structured programme and levelled in difficulty so teachers can match the best books to your child's skills. It should be a comfortable read – endless struggling is no fun and can put children off! Enjoy talking about it together too.





Tip 2: Still phonics first

It's still good to begin with a phonics first approach when your child gets stuck on a word. But now you may also try different tactics too. For example, get them to say the first sound of the word, or break it into chunks or read the whole sentence again, focusing on the meaning.

Tip 3: Try chunking

Sometimes your child will still need to work out an unfamiliar word sound by sound, but increasingly it might be easier to look at the chunks or syllables in a word, for example *camp-ing* or *butt-er-fly*. Help them to do this.

Tip 4: Spot letter patterns in words

Ask your child to point out words that look like they should rhyme but don't: *home* and *come*; *do* and *no*. And words which do rhyme even though they look different: *come* and *sum*; *there*, *bear*, *hair*. This will help with their writing too.

Tip 5: Get your child to perform

When your child reads aloud encourage lots of expression and get them to use different voices for the different characters or to use different volume or pace. Reading to a younger sibling might demand this and is great practice! Or get them to try learning a poem off by heart. And making a sound recording is fun too.

Tip 6: Quiet time and silent reading

As well as reading books aloud together, encourage your child to sometimes read alone and sometimes silently. This isn't as easy as it sounds, but it shows that your child is reading more effortlessly. Show how you read your own book or newspaper silently.





Top tips: age 7-9

Your child will now be developing confidence and increasing independence not only in what they read but in what they choose to read. But they still need you to guide them. These top tips will help you to keep a good balance between reading for enjoyment across a range of interests, developing the skills to help your child read fluently and encouraging independence.

Sharing reading

Tip 1: It's still good to share

Hearing a story read to you (rather than watching a story on TV or as a film) is hugely important for developing reading skills, but it's also a relaxing routine which prepares children for a good night's sleep. Hearing a story read out loud also means that children can have access to books that may as yet be too challenging to read alone

Tip 2: Open up the world of reading

Share the variety of your reading with your child: books, magazines, websites, and apps, to show how reading can help you to follow your interests and to get involved. Help them to join blogs, online communities and clubs that link to their hobbies whether it's swimming, football, dance or music.

Always check that any online communities children sign up to are safe and monitor their use of them.

Developing fluency and understanding

Tip 1: Encourage prediction

When reading stories, good readers are always thinking ahead to start to work out what might happen next. You can help your child become better at this by asking key questions such as: *I wonder if ... will happen? Who do you think will...?*

Tip 2: Research for homework

Your child may be asked to investigate a topic or find answers to questions set in class. You can help them with their research skills by talking about where to look to find the answers, although you may need to remind them to look in books and use the library as well as the internet. Children can struggle with information overload so they need your help to 'search and sift' both sites and information to make decisions.





Building independence

Tip 1: Valuing choice

It's really important to value your child's choices even when a book looks too easy or too difficult. Children can read books that appear to be too difficult (especially if it is a topic that interests them) but you'll need to guide them through tricky words, pictures, ideas or even the layout of an information book.

Tip 2: Not giving up

As children read more challenging books be aware that there might be times when they struggle and may seem reluctant to continue – so help them through those patches by reading a bit with them to get them started or hooked into the next chapter. Always balance this with sensitivity and valuing their choice – it's got to be fun!





Top tips: age 9-11

At this stage your child may well be reading independently at home and school for lots of different purposes, although some children may be reluctant to read adventurously and can get stuck on one author, series or type of book.

There's probably quite a bit more homework to do and it's more likely to require some reading and research.

If you are concerned about your child's reading progress then pop into school to talk to the teacher first. If you are worried about your child's interest in reading then there are lots of people to help (the teacher, librarian, booksellers) and good sites too.

Sharing reading

Tip 1: It's still good to share

It might get increasingly difficult to make time for the 'bedtime reading experience' now but it's still really useful and enjoyable; reading to your child, listening to your child read, leaving them to read alone and listening to audio books are all valuable. Try to chat informally about reading and swap ideas about good reads – no pressure!

Tip 2: Keep opening up the world of reading

Share the variety of your reading with your child: books, magazines, websites, and apps, to show how reading can help you to follow your interests and to get involved. Help them to join blogs, online communities and clubs that link to their hobbies whether it's swimming, football, dance or music.

Developing fluency and understanding

Tip 1: Reading between the lines

Talking about stories, poems and information books can help your child to understand a book in different ways. It's not just about what's happened or who did what, so talk about the issues, what a book means to your child and whether they think there are any less obvious meanings that the author wants us to spot.

Tip 2: Research for homework

If your child is asked to research a topic, talk to them about how they will tackle the task. Remind them to look in books and use the library as well as the internet. Talk to them about how you decide what to use and what to reject – as well as how you know how to trust sources.





Building independence

Tip 1: Valuing choice but nudging forward

It continues to be really important to value your child's choices even when it wouldn't be your first choice. Children enjoy reading series of books, such as *Beast Quest*, or *Rainbow Fairies*, or books by one author, e.g. Jacqueline Wilson, and these really help with their reading pace and stamina. However, over time it's a good idea to try to gently move them on to keep their reading experience fresh and broad.

Tip 2: Reading clubs and groups

Show your child that there are opportunities to share reading ideas and recommendations – and the excitement of reading – through a variety of clubs, groups, festivals, etc.

Useful Website Links

[Booktrust](#)

[Guardian Children's Books](#)

[Love Reading for Kids](#)

[Just Imagine](#)

[Books for Keeps](#)

[World Book Day](#)

More information:

<https://www.oxfordowl.co.uk>

