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# A guide to helping your child with their reading and writing

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# Learning to Read and Write

## Skills for reading and writing

- Speaking and listening are the foundations for reading and writing.
- Even everyday activities such as preparing meals, tidying up, putting shopping away and getting ready to go out offer you the chance to talk to your child, explaining what you are doing. Through these activities, children hear the way language is put together into sentences for a purpose.
- Books are a rich source of new words for your child; words you would not use in everyday conversations appear in books. Children need to have a wide vocabulary to understand the meaning of books, so read aloud and share books as often as you can. They will enjoy it and it will be useful to them when they come across these words in their own reading later on.



## **Ways you can support your children at home: talking and listening**

- **Make time to listen to your child talking** – as you meet them from school, as you walk, or travel home by car, in the supermarket as you shop, at meal times, bath times, and bedtimes – any time!
- **Switch off the TV, radio and mobile phones** – and really listen!
- **Show that you are interested in what they are talking about** – look at your child, smile, nod your head, ask a question or make a response to show that you really have been listening.
- **Make a collection of different toy creatures** – for example, a duck, a snake, an alien, say the sound it might make as you play together, for example, ‘quack-quack’, ‘sssssss’, ‘yuk-yuk’, and encourage your child to copy you.
- **Listen at home** – switch off the TV and listen to the sounds, both inside and outside the home. Can your child tell you what sounds they heard, in the order in which they heard them?
- **Play-a-tune** – and follow me! Make or buy some simple shakers, drums and beaters, then play a simple tune and ask your child to copy. Have fun!
- **Use puppets** and toys to make up stories or retell known ones. Record your child telling the story and play it back to them.

As we begin to teach the children the skills that they will need to become successful readers and writers, we focus on speaking and listening activities.

We explore body sounds, sounds in the environment, the difference in the sounds of percussion instruments, rhythm and rhyme, voice sounds and alliteration - words that all begin with the same initial sound – ‘sad, Sammy snake’, ‘big, bad bug’.

All the way through we also teach the skills of ‘blending’ and segmenting’.

- Blending

We teach the children how to blend or merge sounds together to read each word, in the right order, to read a word. E.g. c-a-t = cat.

- Segmenting

We teach the children how to segment each word to spell. E.g. cat = c-a-t

The aim is for the children to read the whole word automatically.

These activities are all done orally. The emphasis is on helping children to hear the separate sounds in words and to create spoken sounds.



## Ways you can support your children at home

### **Sound-talking or Robot-talking**

Find real objects around your home that have three phonemes (*sounds*) and practice ‘sound talk’. First, just let them listen, then see if they will join in, for example, saying:

‘I spy a p-e-g – peg.’

‘I spy a c-u-p – cup.’

‘Where’s your other s-o-ck – sock?’

‘Simon says – put your hands on your h-ea-d.’

‘Simon says – touch your ch-i-n.’

## **Ways you can support your children at home**

### **Magnetic letters**

Get some magnetic letters for your fridge, or for use with a tin tray. Find out which letters have been taught – have fun finding these with your child and place them on the magnetic surface.

### **Making little words together**

Make little words together, for example, *it, up, am, and, top, dig, run, met, pick*. As you select the letters, say them aloud: '*a-m – am*', '*m-e-t – met*'.

### **Breaking words up**

Now do it the other way around: read the word, break the word up and move the letters away, saying: '*met – m-e-t*'.

**Both these activities help children to see that reading and spelling are reversible processes.**

### **Don't forget the writing box!**

Spelling is harder than reading words – praise, don't criticise. Little whiteboards and pens, and magic boards, are a good way for children to try out spellings and practice their handwriting.

Your child might be trying to use letters from their name to write; this shows that they know that writing needs real alphabet letters.

Make or buy an alphabet poster.

## **Reading at home with your child.**

- Be sure to sit down in a quiet space to read with your child. Routine is best.
- Discuss the book cover; title, author, characters, setting and encourage them to tell you what they think the story is about.
- Encourage STORY TELLING through the pictures, especially if the book has no words.
- Model good reading skills; turning the pages left to right and point to the words as you read them.
- Encourage your child to identify what sounds are in the words. Can they blend the sounds together?
- Discuss each page with your child. Do they understand the story or are they simply reading the words?
- Provide lots of opportunities for them to read to you but also READ BOOKS TO YOUR CHILD.
- If you feel your child is really struggling with reading the words in their books, don't panic!
- The class teacher will have already identified any children who are not quite ready for reading words yet so remember all those important pre reading skills like talking about the pictures, telling stories and pointing to the words as you read them.
- Children may bring home books with no words, these books will encourage story telling through pictures – a vitally important part of learning to read!
- If at any time you feel your child is struggling with their book or they are simply just not enjoying reading then please speak to your child's class teacher who will be happy to help.



## **Getting ready for writing**

We will model how to form letters (*graphemes*) correctly, so that children can eventually acquire a fluent and legible handwriting style. These skills develop over a long period of time. A child's ability to form a letter correctly is a separate skill from phonics. Holding a pen or pencil needs considerable co-ordination and practice in making small movements with hands and fingers.

In the early stages of phonics children can use letter cards or magnetic letters to demonstrate their knowledge of phonics.



## **Writing in lower-case letters**

We teach lower-case letters, as well as capital letters. As most writing will be in lower-case letters it is useful if you can use these at home. A good start is for your child to write their name correctly, starting with a capital letter followed by lower-case letters.



## **Ways you can support your children at home**

### **Using their whole body**

For handwriting children need to be well co-ordinated through their whole body, not just their hands and fingers. Games that help co-ordination include throwing balls at a target, under-arm and over-arm, and bouncing balls – also skipping on the spot, throwing a Frisbee, picking up pebbles from the beach and throwing them into the sea. Have fun!

### **Hand and finger play**

Action rhymes such as *'Incy wincy spider'*, *'One potato, two potato'* and *'Tommy Thumb'* are great fun and get their hands and fingers moving. Playing with salt dough or clay really helps strengthen little fingers, as does cookery and using simple toolkits.

### **Hand–eye co-ordination**

Pouring water into jugs and cups of different sizes, sweeping up with a dustpan and brush, cutting, sticking, tracing, threading beads, completing puzzles, peeling off stickers and sticking them in the right place – these all help hand–eye co-ordination.

### **Pencil hold**

The 'pincer' movement needs to be practiced. This is important as it enables children to hold a pencil properly as they write. Provide them with kitchen tongs and see if they can pick up small objects. Move

on to challenging them to pick up smaller things, for example, little cubes, sugar lumps, dried peas, lentils, first with chopsticks, then with tweezers.

Ask children to peg objects to a washing line.

Provide plenty of different types of pen and pencil; hold their hand to practice the correct grip. E.g. to, no, the, go. This will be achieved using flash cards and games.



### **Ways you can support your child at home**

- Set a timer. Call out one word at a time and get your child to spell it on a magic board or a small whiteboard, against the timer – remember, they can use magnetic letters.
- Play a game – hunt the word - hide words in sand or flour, set a timer, hold up the word that you want them to hunt for, and 'go'! Repeat the word and encourage them to say –'I am looking for the word 'the'.
- Play '**Pairs**', turning over two words at a time trying to find a matching pair. This is especially helpful with the tricky words: **the the, to to, no no, go go, I I**
- Don't worry if they get some wrong! These are hard to remember – they need plenty of practice.

Your involvement in your child's learning is vital, and we ask that whenever possible you take time to encourage them to use their new knowledge through the activities outlined above.

Thank you for your anticipated support and if anything needs more clarification, then please do not hesitate to speak to your child's class teacher.

**Happy reading and writing!**