

Improving Literacy Brief for Parents and Families

LEARNING ABOUT YOUR CHILD'S READING DEVELOPMENT

WHAT SHOULD CHILDREN LEARN?

Learning to read is difficult and does not happen naturally. It requires explicit and systematic instruction, which is especially important for struggling readers. Learning to read involves many different skills that must be taught to your child. Instruction in phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension will help your child learn to read. Young children often need explicit instruction in phonological awareness and phonics. Your child needs to be able to sound out words correctly and quickly to understand what is read. As children get older, the need for this instruction typically lessens unless they continue to struggle with these skills. Teaching vocabulary and comprehension also begins when your child is young and continues throughout the school years. A child's reading comprehension can also improve when he or she writes about what he or she read.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Being informed about the parts of literacy, how children learn to read, and why they might struggle can help you make better decisions about your child's education. Research shows that when schools, teachers, and families are well-informed, children make greater gains in reading and writing.

HOW DO CHILDREN TYPICALLY DEVELOP IN READING?

Children typically move through several stages as they learn to read:

- Emergent readers (usually birth to age six) are learning our sound system and how print works, including letter-sound relationships, and the meaning of stories read to them.
- Early readers (usually age six and seven) are linking speech sounds to letters to make words, learning to decode words, and beginning to make sense of what they read.
- Transitional readers (usually age seven and eight) are usually reading "like they talk" and have strategies to help them decode words and read with understanding, but may still need support with more difficult reading material.
- Fluent readers (usually ages eight and up) are reading independently with confidence and understand longer and more difficult types of material. They use word parts to figure out words and relate sections of the story to one another.
- As fluent readers enter middle and high school, they often read material that has many viewpoints and more complex language and ideas. They draw on what they know from other reading material and experiences to judge what they read and come to conclusions.

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WHAT IF I HAVE CONCERNS?

Reading difficulties are most common in the earliest stages of reading. Some children continue to struggle or show new difficulties in later grades. Children struggle to read for many reasons. They may have trouble with speech sounds, recognizing words, or understanding what they read. Reading may be hard because children have limited English language ability or experience with print. Also, instruction might not be matched to children's needs. Schools often use a tiered system of learning support to help children with reading difficulties.

Speak up if you have concerns about your child's progress at school. Share if there is a family history of reading difficulties. Note if he or she refuses to read, says that reading is hard, or feels embarrassed about reading aloud. Difficulties can be spotted early. Signs include having trouble:

- Noticing and naming rhymes
- Noticing and playing with individual sounds in spoken words
- Quickly naming aloud a series of familiar items, like letters, numbers, or colors
- Sounding out unknown words
- Remembering words seen many times before
- Reading "like you talk" instead of word by word
- Remembering the ideas in a story
- Spelling words correctly

SUGGESTED CITATION

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Is Your Child Having Reading Difficulties?

A Checklist



Warning signs of reading disabilities can appear in early childhood – but early intervention can help.

Does your child have trouble:

- Remembering words seen many times before?
- Recognizing speech sounds?
- Understanding the content of what is being read?
- Reading aloud?
- Noticing and naming rhymes?
- Remembering the ideas in a story?
- Spelling words correctly?
- Noticing and playing with individual sounds in spoken words?
- Quickly naming aloud a series of familiar items like letters, numbers, or colors?
- Sounding out unknown words?
- Reading “like you talk” instead of word by word?

Speak up if you have concerns about your child’s progress, and share if there is a family history of reading difficulties.

Early screening and intervention are critical! For more information and support, visit improvingliteracy.org.