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How to Help Parents with Beginning Readers

After children are familiar with prereading skills, the instructional focus shifts to vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. Most vocabulary is learned indirectly through everyday experiences with both written and oral language. Many children learn new words through read-alouds, but also through conversation. Persuade parents to continue to read to their children, choose books that are a little higher in vocabulary than the books their children are reading independently, and expose them to new words. Parents should also talk with their children, use new and interesting words, and encourage their children to use the new words, too. This will help them recognize the new words when seen in print. Parents should take children on new adventures and field trips. These experiences often yield new vocabulary.

Explain to parents that, as their children learn to read, it can be very helpful to let their children read some during the daily read-aloud sessions. The parent and the child can share the reading by taking turns reading aloud. One type of text to use is a regular book. Here the adult starts the reading, and looks ahead for shorter sentences, passages the child can read, or words the child may know. The child reads those parts. Another type of text is where the parent and the child passages are offered at different levels. The parent reads the more sophisticated text and the child reads selections written at the child's level. Some of the words on the child's pages may be previewed on the adult pages. This makes the child's reading more predictable, and leads to better comprehension and fluency success. A series of this kind of book is *We Both Read* (www.webothread.com).

Communicate to parents that they should provide assistance when their children have trouble to help ward off frustration. If a child gets stuck on a word, instruct parents that it is important to tell the word. If a child gets tired, it is

VOCABULARY, COMPREHENSION, AND FLUENCY

VOCABULARY

The words readers read and know. The larger the reader's vocabulary, the easier it is to make sense of the text.

The National Reading Panel stresses the need for teaching new words, either as they appear in text, or by introducing new words separately. (The National Reading Panel is a project of the National Institute of Health and Human Development and the United States Department of Education created to evaluate existing research and evidence to find the best ways of teaching reading to children. Check out www.nichd.nih.gov to read more about it.)

COMPREHENSION

Comprehension is the reason for reading. It is simply an understanding of what is being read.

The National Reading Panel adds to this the techniques for helping individuals understand what they read. Such techniques involve having students summarize what they've read to gain a better understanding of the material.

FLUENCY

The ability to recognize words easily, read with greater speed, accuracy, and expression, and better understand what is read.

Children gain fluency by practicing reading until the process becomes automatic. The National Reading Panel adds to this that guided oral repeated reading helps children become fluent readers.

acceptable to take over the reading or to stop and pick it up another night. Keeping this fun will ensure interest in additional reading time together.

What should readers do when coming across a new word for the first time?

Word attack strategies include the following:

1. looking for beginnings and endings
2. looking for smaller words within words
3. applying common sounds
4. applying less common sounds
5. using context clues

Try playing a game called “Stump the Reader”. Parents can ask their children to preview some reading material and look for a word that even a good reader might not know. Ask the child to write the word on a piece of paper. The parent then, as the reader, can model some word attack strategies to decode that word. Start by looking at beginnings and endings. Look for smaller words within the word. Putting a finger over those pieces of the word may turn a larger word into a much smaller and more manageable word. Try common sounds for the leftover letters, and try uncommon sounds, like “c” making the /s/ sound for the remaining leftover letters. Add that parents can go to the dictionary if necessary, or seek an outside expert.

There are many, many word games to play. Some of the games are traditional word games like Scrabble, Scrabble Jr., Boggle, Boggle Jr., and Upwords. Other games are Memory, Go Fish, I Spy, and Tic-Tac-Toe, all using letters and words instead of pictures or numbers.

Good readers are curious. Instruct parents to ask questions and encourage their children to ask questions when reading or during a read-aloud. They can ask: “What do you think the characters will do next?” or “Why did the characters do what they did?” Show that open-ended questions are acceptable and preferred. Asking *why* activates more thinking skills, and sparks more discussion, than asking questions that can be answered by “yes” or “no”. When reading *Charlotte’s Web* by E. B. White, for example, parents can ask: “Why do you think Charlotte decided to help Wilbur by writing words in her web?” Open-ended questions can be used

with many stories. “What might happen next?” “Why did the character do that?” “What would you have done?” “How do you think the story will end?” “What do you like best about the story?” “How would you rewrite the story?” Advise parents to ask their children if they found any part of the reading confusing. Encourage parents to discuss and help to clarify this part.

All readers, including beginning readers, need to pay attention to understanding what they are reading. First, direct parents and children to connect a book to familiar parts of the child’s life, such as how the characters are like or unlike people the child knows. Parents can ask, “How is this character like you?” or “Does this character remind you of someone you know?” Specifically, parents can ask: “How is Peter in Ezra Jack Keats’s *The Snowy Day* like your best friend?” Share that making text-to-self connections is helpful in relating to the reading and then reading for meaning. Second, direct parents and children to find connections in books to what is known about the world. Parents can ask questions like: “What do you know about zoo animals?” These questions will help the child when reading a story about elephants, giraffes, or zebras. Share that making text-to-world connections are important to building background knowledge and enhancing reading for meaning. Third, direct parents and children to connect a story idea to another book the child has read. Fairy tales are a great source for this. An example might consist of these similar books: *The Three Little Pigs* by Dev Ross, *Big Bad Wolf is Good* by Simon Puttock, *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* by Jon Scieszka , and *The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig* by Eugene Trivizas. Ask how the wolf character in one story is similar or different to the wolf character in another story. Making text-to-text connections is crucial to comprehension. It helps develop response skills.

Ready to read something more substantial that might take more than one sitting? Ready to move onto chapter books? Comprehension is more than just asking questions after reading. Understanding is enhanced when questions are asked before or during the reading. Tell parents to ask a simple question, maybe even a retell question, asking for as many details as possible, after a reading session or a chapter is completed, and then ask the same question when picking

up the story at the next session. This will bring the reader back into the story refocused on the plot and will boost reading for meaning for the new session. At the same time, the child will see reading as an activity that includes reading for meaning and not just reading words in print like a list.

A simple game to enhance comprehension is another “I Am Thinking” game. Here the parent thinks of something simple. Usually something in the room works well. The child asks a question about the object. “Is it red?” “Can it move?” “Is it bigger than a bread box?” The parent answers with “yes” or “no.” The child continues to refine his or her questions to arrive at the correct answer. Take this further by thinking of a character in a story being read. The child asks a question about the character. The parent answers with “yes” or “no” until the child reaches the correct answer.

Here are two cautions to share with parents for when they and the child begin to take turns in the read-alouds, and when the child is ready to start reading on his or her own. For a first caution, when the child initially begins to read out loud, offer encouragement and support. If the child comes across a new or tricky word, it is acceptable, and even encouraged, to give the word. If the child becomes frustrated and tired, then tell parents to offer some words of praise and take over the reading.

For a second caution, when readers start putting everything together and reading, some parents will push their children to read only the words. Some parents will even go as far as to cover up the pictures. Yet these pictures are still a part of the story. Readers should still be encouraged to use the picture clues to help with new words, to reinforce that they are reading the correct words, or to refine reading for meaning. So, tell parents to continue to use picture clues for as long as the pictures accompany the text.

The reason many children do not read as much as they should read in order to grow as readers is not because they do not like reading, but more because they cannot find books that interest them. Therefore, it is most important to find books that children will enjoy reading. Ask parents the following questions: Does your child have a book he or she likes to read over and over again? Does your child like

some specific characters or a series? Does your child have a favorite sport, specific hobby, or special collection? Encourage parents to help their children find more like the ones their children already enjoy.

Check out the local bookstores as well as the public libraries. Does the child have a favorite television show or movie? Perhaps that show or movie was based upon a book, or perhaps that show or movie has spawned some books, so find those books. Has the child seen something of particular interest on television lately? Then head to the library, do a little bit of research, and find out more. Does the child play or work on the computer? Encourage the child to read more off the computer screen. In addition, look to the newspaper for comics and look for joke books. This age and level of readers need to see that reading opportunities are all around them. Furthermore, keep books and other reading materials within arm's reach. Children are more likely to pick up books when they can reach them.

Fluency may be a new term to parents. You may need to define it for them. What it is. Why it's important. Take a look at the definition of fluency in the sidebar titled Vocabulary, Comprehension, and Fluency on page 32 and share some of those ideas.

There are many ways to improve reading fluency. The first rule of thumb to share with parents is to remember that easy books, and old favorites, are still appropriate. Reading books that are either easy or extremely familiar is a good way to foster practice and improve reading speed. Readers are not stumbling over new words, and are not focusing on the other reading elements, but are focusing on reading smoothly, and in most cases, automatically.

Parents can become actively involved. One of the best ways to do this is through paired reading. This strategy involves two readers reading the same material at the same time. The first key to success here is that the adult reads loud enough for the child to hear both the adult's voice and his or her own voice. The second key is that the adult reads slowly and at the child's reading pace. When adults read with a child like this, and read even the most difficult words correctly, model fluent reading, show some excitement when appropriate, and stop at the

punctuation marks, the child hears this and mimics this. Some parents complete all of the reading together. Other parents start reading together, but stop when the child signals he or she is ready to read alone.

A similar strategy is echo reading. The parent reads a paragraph, sentence, or phrase, and the child reads—echoes—the same paragraph, sentence, or phrase. The first key to success is to determine how much to read. Some readers can manage echo reading a full paragraph. Others can manage only a phrase. The second key to success is to make sure the child reader actually reads the passage and doesn't just recite from memory. Pointing to the words may help.

Another way to improve fluency is the shared reading experience, in which the parent and child take turns reading aloud. This can be done with regular books or books written with two levels of text. Please see the suggestions on interactive and shared reading on page 31 at the beginning of this chapter.

Reading fluency is extremely important to comprehension, and creative ideas for improving fluency are numerous. Books on tape is another way to work at fluency. Instruct parents to use the tapes with the texts and make sure the child follows correctly. If the goal is reading for enjoyment, then following along with just the pictures is fine. If the goal is reading to improve fluency, then the reader needs to be on the matching word at the appropriate time. Caution parents to teach the reader what to do if he or she has lost the place. One strategy is to skip ahead to the beginning of the next paragraph and to listen carefully for the first word. Another strategy is to listen for the page turning signal and pick up there.

Reading aloud with easy books is one of the best ways for children to improve fluency, so try to increase that amount of time. Parents can help by encouraging children to read aloud more often. Some children can read aloud from a book while riding in the car. It's a wonderful way to pass time on both long and short trips. Suggest parents invite all family members to bring a book to the dinner table so they can read a favorite section aloud. An alternative is to invite family members to read from comic books or newspaper comics, using different voices for the characters.

Parents can ask an older child to read to a younger child. This is beneficial because the older child will often find an easier book that interests the younger child. Warn parents that just because a book is a picture book doesn't necessarily mean it is an easy book. Some picture books have high-level vocabulary words. The older child might want to practice reading out loud before reading to an audience.

Want to provide reading material at all opportunities? Instruct parents to write notes that their children can easily read. Put these notes beside the bed, on the bathroom mirror, or in a lunchbox to be read at school. These will not only put a smile on the child's face, but will create additional reading and learning opportunities.

Dear Parents,

Beginning readers need help to become successful readers. Please continue to read aloud to your child daily. Choose books with a little more complex vocabulary than the books he or she is reading independently.

When your child is ready, let him or her read some during the read-aloud sessions. Remember to help when needed. If your child gets stuck on a word, it's OK to give the word. If your child gets tired, take over the reading or stop and pick it up another night. Offer positive reinforcement to keep this fun. Keeping this fun will ensure your child wants to have additional reading time together.

Good readers are curious. Ask questions and encourage your children to ask questions when reading or during a read-aloud. Open-ended questions are acceptable and preferred. These are questions that start with "why" or "how". Also try to relate the story to life. Ask how a main character might be like or unlike yourselves, or someone else you know. Relate the story to the world. What happens in the world that is similar to events in the story? Relate the events to another book. How is this story like another you've read? These connections help children understand the reading better.

I have to share some cautions with you. When your child initially begins to read out loud, offer support and encouragement. Do whatever is necessary to keep the positive attitude. There will be a point when your child puts everything together and starts reading. Remember that pictures are still a part of the reading. Encourage your child to use the pictures when stuck on a word, or to confirm a correct reading.

Finally, the reason some children do not read as much as they should is not because they do not like reading, but because they cannot find books that interest them. If your child has a book he or she likes to read over and over again, then find some more like it. If your child has a favorite author or illustrator, then find more books by that same author or illustrator.

Yours in reading,

10 Ways to Help Your Child with Vocabulary

1. Talk with your children. Use new words.
2. Read to your child often. Choose books to read to your child that are written at a higher level than your child's present reading vocabulary level.
3. Take your child on field trips. This helps your child learn more words.
4. Help with word attack strategies. Look for smaller words within words, beginnings and endings, common sounds, less common sounds like "c" making the /s/ sound, and context clues. Help your child learn how to use the other words in the sentences for help, consult a dictionary, or ask for help.
5. Play Stump the Reader. Ask your child to find a word you might not know and write it down. Model the word attack strategies above to determine the new word.
6. Play some purchased traditional games. Those include Scrabble, Scrabble Jr., Upwords, Boggle Jr., and Password. All are available in most retail stores.
7. Play some homemade games. Play something like Memory, Go Fish, or Tic-Tac-Toe using words or letters.
8. Write 20 new words on some index cards. Make 5 columns and categorize those words so that similar words are together.
9. Challenge each family member to come to the dinner table with a new word to share with the rest of the family.
10. Read, read, read. Simply read. The more a child reads, the more words a child sees, and the more words a child learns. Children who do the best on tests are often the children who read the most.

10 Ways to Help Your Child with Comprehension

1. Encourage your child to ask questions about what they are reading. Also encourage your child to ask questions, even if they don't pertain to what they are currently reading. The question and answer may be helpful in later reading.
2. Ask questions before, during, and after the reading. Try to connect the reading to events in the child's life as much as possible.
3. Ask questions before the reading. Preview the story. Look at the cover, and look at the pictures. Make some predictions.
4. Stop and ask questions in the middle of the reading. Try to relate to the text.
5. When reading a chapter book, when finished reading for one session, stop and summarize what was read. Before reading the next time, use that same summary to remember and reconnect with the text. This will boost comprehension for the new reading.
6. Ask open-ended questions. These are questions that don't have one-word answers. Questions that begin with *why* or *how* often yield good answers.
7. Make as many connections as you can. Make some text-to-self connections. Try to see how the book you are reading relates to you. How is the main character like you or someone you know? These connections help to improve comprehension.
8. Play an "I am thinking" game. Say: "I am thinking about someone in the story who helps the cat. Who am I thinking about?" Continue to give simple clues until the answer is discovered.
9. Share ideas about the funniest and most interesting characters.
10. Be ready to go to another source for more information.

10 Ways to Help Your Child with Fluency

1. Easy books, books a child has read before, and old favorites are most appropriate.
2. Reading aloud is great practice.
3. Paired Reading. An adult and a child read together at the same time. The adult reads loud enough for the child to hear both the adult voice and his or her own voice, and remembers to read slowly at the child's reading pace. Some parents complete all of the reading together. Other parents start reading together, the child signals when ready to read solo, and then the reading is completed by the child.
4. Echo Reading. The adult reads a paragraph, sentence, or phrase and the child reads the same section afterwards, like an echo. Some readers can manage echo reading a full paragraph. Others can manage only a phrase.
5. Shared Reading. The adult and the child share the reading by taking turns reading aloud. This can be done with two different kinds of texts. With a regular book, the adult and child just take turns reading. The adult starts the reading, and looks ahead for shorter sentences, passages the child can read, or words the child may know. The child reads those parts. In some books, the texts for the parent and the child are different. The parent reads the more sophisticated text and the child reads selections written at the child's level. Check out We Both Read books at www.webothread.com
6. Books on tape.
7. Older children read to younger children.
8. Read aloud while riding in the car.
9. Family members bring a favorite passage or favorite poem to read out loud at the dinner table.
10. Read from a comic book and mimic how the character may speak the part.

