

Tips for Helping Children With Reading Comprehension Difficulties

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Does your child have difficulty remembering or understanding what he/she reads? If your child reads slowly and struggles with words that should be familiar, then it is probable that your child does not comprehend what he/she is reading. As your child progresses through school, the inability to read comprehensively affects how he/she gains knowledge. Below are strategies to assist parents in improving their child's reading comprehension skills.



Improve Decoding Skills

In order for children to understand what they read, they must first be able to read words on the page. They must be aware of letters and the sounds they make and understand that they must blend these sounds to make words. This is decoding. Good readers determine if the words they read make sense in a sentence. If the words do not make sense, they go back and try reading those words again. Prompt your child when he/she reads a word incorrectly by asking, "Does that word make sense in the sentence?" If he/she responds "no," have the child decode the word(s) and reread the sentence.

Improve Vocabulary Skills

Reading comprehension improves when a child understands vocabulary words in their context. As your child reads, have him/her make a flashcard for each unfamiliar or difficult word. Help your child look up the meaning of the word in the dictionary or glossary and talk about its meaning in the context of the sentence.

Improve Active Comprehension Strategies

Good readers use strategies to prepare themselves for reading a particular text. These strategies may include:

- Making predictions while they are reading.
- Making connections to what they already know.
- Determining the meanings of unfamiliar words based on context clues.
- Interpreting the text (following printed directions, understanding a sequence of events, understanding and interpreting the mood of the story and feelings of the characters).
- Generalizing how the ideas revealed in the text may apply to future readings (a chronicle of historical or scientific events).

Struggling readers have difficulty with all of the skills above and require more instructional time and practice. Below are general activities to do with your child at home to improve active reading comprehension skills. Help and encourage your child to prepare to read for pleasure or complete classroom assignments using the tips below.

- "Walk" through the story (or assignment) page by page and look at pictures, illustrations, headers, sidebars, etc. This helps the child prepare for the information he/she is about to read as well as improve comprehension and concentration.

- Separate what the child is reading into story grammar components: setting, main character, action, and outcome.
- Take turns reading aloud and find places to stop, discuss, make comments, give opinions, and relate to personal experiences. When parents read aloud, they should model correct inflection and feelings.
- Listen to your child read aloud for a few minutes every day. The length of time should be appropriate for the child's age (a minute for every year of age). The book he/she is reading aloud should be at a level slightly below his/her classroom instruction in order to foster reading fluency. Ask your child's teacher for a suggested booklist.
- Reread favorite books. Rereading familiar books provides good practice for fluency and decoding. Your child should be able to read at a smooth, conversational pace.
- Read aloud to your child often from a book, magazine, or newspaper article. This helps build vocabulary. Ask questions frequently about the content and details, and ask him/her to retell the story to check the level of understanding.
- Talk about what your child reads to you. This helps him/her remember and think through the themes of the book. Ask your child questions about the content of the book before, during, and after reading. Use pictures or illustrations to extend discussion about the story or topic.
- Explore different forms of reading material. Take a trip to the library; check out a book and its companion audio tape or CD. Have your child read aloud with the narrator of the book while listening to the text on tape or CD. This helps the child learn to emulate inflection and feeling.
- Provide age-appropriate magazines! Children will read books and magazines over and over when it's something of interest to them. Larger bookstores have a huge selection of books and magazines spanning from sports to doll collecting. Allow your child to choose his/her reading material by providing several choices and allowing him/her to make the final decision.
- Find popular children's books that are now available as screenplays on video or DVD. Have your child read the book version and then, watch the screenplay. Talk about the similarities or differences between the book and the screenplay. Ask your child how the screenplay compares to what he/she visualized while reading the book.



It is extremely important that parents are active, encouraging, involved, and most of all, setting the example that reading is important. Consult your child's teacher for information and guidance in selecting the appropriate level of reading materials outside the classroom. Ask him/her for other helpful reading strategies to ensure that your child is getting all the help he/she needs to become a successful reader.

Resources

- Williams, Joanna. (2000). Improving comprehension for students with LD. *LD Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.ldonline.org/article/86>
- Baumel, Jan. (2002). *Learning to read – Research informs us*. Retrieved from <http://www.schwablearning.org>
- Pressley, Michael. (2000). Comprehension instruction: What works. *LD Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.ldonline.org/article/68>