



Getting ready for reading, writing and spelling

Activities for busy mums,
dads and carers

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Research shows that reading to a young child is the most important thing you can do to help your child's education.

Reading can show you CARE for your child

Reading can help you CONNECT with your child

Reading can unlock CONFIDENCE in your child

This little guide gives you creative, practical and easy ways to help you help your child as they start out on the road to enjoying reading for themselves.

Parents and carers have discovered that spending just 10 minutes of focussed reading time a day can make a world of difference, not only to your child but also to you!

Children learn from other people. As parents and carers you are your child's first teachers. You have a powerful influence on your child's early learning.

From an early age your child will experience a wide range of activities and experiences with you, for example, singing and saying rhymes, making and listening to music, being listened to and joining in conversations, painting and pretend play, to develop their early reading and writing skills. These activities will help your child take the first important steps towards reading and writing.



Children's spoken language supports reading and writing

Children need opportunities to talk with others as they develop and practise their speaking and listening skills. This helps to build confidence and improve their ability to communicate with other people.

Work through the activities and tick the ones you have completed.

Top Tips on talking and listening to your child

- **Make time to listen to your child talking** – as you meet them from their school setting or travelling home, in the supermarket, at meal, bath and bedtimes – any time!

- **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.



- **Use puppets** and toys to make up stories. Record them telling the story and play it back to them.

- **Make a collection of different toy creatures** – a duck, a snake, an alien, say the sound it might make eg, 'quack-quack', 'sssssss', and encourage them to copy you.

- **Listen at home** - listen to the sounds both inside and outside the home. Can they tell you what sounds they heard?

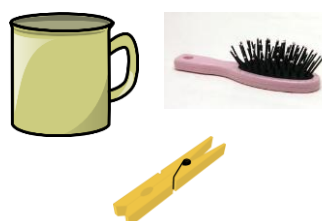
- **Encourage them to talk about their day** – Ask questions about their day at playgroup, nursery or school.

- **What did you eat?**
 - **Who did you play with?**
 - **What fun things did you do today?**
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When children start school, teachers plan activities that will help them to listen attentively to sounds around them, such as the sounds their toys make and to sounds in spoken language. Teachers sing a wide range of nursery rhymes and songs and read books to and with the children. This helps to increase the number of words they know and helps them talk confidently about books.

Top Tips on practising 'Sound Talk'

- Break down simple words when you are giving instructions or asking questions, eg, 'Can you find your h-a-t, hat?' 'Where is the c-a-t, cat?' 'Sit on the s-ea-t, seat' 'Eat your f-oo-d, food'. It is important to say the sounds (phonemes) aloud, in order, all through the word.
- Play 'What's in the box?' Put some toys or objects in a bag and pull one out at a time. Emphasise the first sound of the name of the toy or object by repeating it for example, 'ccccc – car', 'bbbb – box'.
- Play 'Simon Says' – 'Simon says put your hands on your h-ea-d, Simon says everyone j-u-m-p'.
- Say: 'A tiny tin of tomatoes!' 'Joe, the jammy juicy juggler!' 'A lovely little lemon'. This is called **alliteration**. Use names too, eg, Gurpreet gets the giggles', 'Milo makes music', 'Naheema's nose'.
- Find objects around your home that have three phonemes (sounds) and practise 'sound talk'. First let your child listen, then see if they will join in, saying: 'I spy with my little eye p-e-g, c-u-p'.



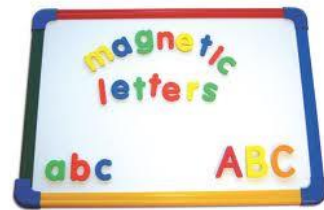
Blending and segmenting (skills for reading and spelling)

Blending is a vital skill for reading. The separate sounds (phonemes) of the word are spoken aloud, in order, all through the word, and are then merged together into the whole word. This merging together is called **blending** eg, **c-a-t = cat**.

Segmenting is a vital skill for spelling. The whole word is spoken aloud, and then broken up into its separate sounds in order, all through the word. For example, the adult would say **cat = c-a-t**.

Top Tips on practising words using blending and segmenting skills

- Buy magnetic letters for your fridge. Find out which letters have been taught; have fun finding these with your child and place them on the magnetic surface.



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

- Break 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 your child to see that reading and spelling are reversible processes.

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

- Encourage them to use letters from their name to write; this shows that they know that writing needs real alphabet letters.

Reading with your child is one of the most important things you can do. Books are a rich source of new words – words you would not use in everyday conversations appear in books. Children need to have a wide stock of words and understand their meaning, so read aloud as often as you can. There are other ways of reading together as you go about your daily routine which are also very effective.

Top Tips on reading together

- Read traffic signs, street names, shop names etc. Help them by breaking the words into sounds and putting them back together eg N-e-x-t = Next and T-r-ai-n = Train.
- When reading together, have fun changing all the words beginning with 's' to 'sausages' and all the words beginning with 'm' to mash. This creates a funny story.
- Set a timer on your phone, cooker or watch and ask them to read as many words as they can from a list in that time. Make it a daily challenge. Your child's teacher will be able to give you lists of words that they should know.
- Nursery rhymes are fun to learn and share. You can tell them about your favourite nursery rhyme when you were a child.
- When reading a story to your child or when they read to you, make sure they have understood by asking them questions either during or at the end.
 - **What happened in this story?**
 - **How do you think the character was feeling?**
 - **What do you think is going to happen in the end? What would you do?**



Your child will notice adults around them writing and they will want to copy them. In the early stages of learning to write, your child will like experimenting by making marks on paper with a variety of tools such as brushes, pens and felt-tips. They will often include drawings with their writing.


Top Tips on preparing your child for writing

- Games that help co-ordination include throwing balls at a target, under-arm and over-arm, and bouncing balls.
- Hand-eye co-ordination - pouring water into jugs and cups of different sizes, sweeping up with a dustpan and brush, cutting, sticking.
- 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.
- Pencil hold - the 'pincer' movement needs to be practised to help children hold a pencil correctly. Use kitchen tongs and see if they can pick up small objects eg, little cubes, sugar lumps, pasta shapes.
- Provide plenty of different types of pens, pencils and crayons. This will enable them to become used to different writing equipment.
- Let your child see you writing or drawing with either a pen or pencil. They will be encouraged to write themselves soon after.



As children begin to segment sounds, they will be able to start spelling words. If they begin spelling new words with alternative graphemes eg, 'rayn' for 'rain', praise them for remembering 'ay' but ask them to think of an alternative way to spell 'rain'. Making activities multisensory eg, using sand, paint, pasta shells makes spelling memorable and fun.

Top Tips on spelling together

- Play 'I spy' but use the letter sounds, not the letter names. Eg, 'I spy with my little eye something beginning with c-c-c-c (cat) or sh-sh-sh' (shop). Repeat this now using rhyming words. 'I hear with my little ear a word that rhymes with can' (pan). You can use nonsense words eg, 'han'.
- Magnetic letters on the lid of a biscuit tin instantly makes a spelling board. Use these activities: ask your child to make words in rhyming strings eg, rat, cat, mat. Ask them to make a nonsense word for you to sound out. Make words and break them into sounds or syllables. Make an easy word such as 'dog' and then ask them to change the first sound to make another word (hog) or to change the final sound (dot). 
- Arrange jumbled letters to spell the names of animals etc correctly. Example: rezab (zebra).
- Ask your child: 'What's the difference between the sounds in the words 'band' and 'sand'?'
- Use their favourite book and ask them to look for a chosen word or letter eg, a word beginning with a particular letter, the sound '**sh**', a word ending in '**ed**' or an '**s**' plural, words that look nearly the same but only one letter different. Get them to copy these words into a small notebook.

As your child begins to develop their writing skills in school, support them by practising writing at home. As a parent or carer, you have a big influence and writing together will be very enjoyable. Writing about things they enjoy will also motivate them. Remember, writing can be fun with a bit of imagination.

Top Tips on writing together

- Make a writing box for your child. Have lots of nice pens, pencils, paper, cards, paperclips, sticky notes etc.
- Encourage them to write to relatives and try to get a reply. Or, encourage them to write pretend letters to their favourite book or TV characters.
- Write a conversation with your child eg: 'How are you today?' Pass it to them and ask them to reply. Continue the conversation through written messages.
- Dig out some old family photographs and attach some cut out speech bubbles. Fill the speech bubbles or write captions for the photographs. This can also be done with pictures from magazines.
- Create a scrap book eg, 'All About Me'. The more that they write in it, the more fun it will be to look back on in years to come. Include tickets, photographs, brochures, packaging etc.



It is important not to worry if your child doesn't want to read and write at home; keep on sharing books and talking together. If you have fun reading stories then chances are they will too! There is no need to insist that they do some writing – more often than not they will choose to do so when they have a real reason to. Younger children can have a short attention span so 'little but often' might be the best way to keep them motivated and enthusiastic.

Top Tips to support your child if they are reluctant to read or write at home

- Read to your child. Show you like the book. Bring stories to life by using loud, soft, scary voices – let yourself go!
- Try reading adventure stories in the dark or under the duvet by torchlight.
- Let them choose what they would like to read – books, comics, catalogues.
- Make up a story together about one of their toys. You write for them, repeating the sentences as you write. They can draw pictures to go with it.
- Compose an email together inviting a friend over to tea.



Remember to *HAVE FUN!*

Children love it when their parents play with them and praise them. Use these positive, encouraging statements with your child:

Well done for trying so hard!

You can do it!

I like the way you sounded out that word.

You did really well remembering to spell that word.



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