

# Helping Your Child Become a Reader



DONNA M. SCANLON\*

KIMBERLY L. ANDERSON\*\*

MARY-JO MORSE\*\*\*

THEA YURKEWECZ\*



\*Child Research and Study Center & Dept. of Literacy Teaching and Learning, University at Albany

\*\*Dept. of Literacy Studies, English Education & History Education, East Carolina University

\*\*\*Dept. of Literacy, State University at Cortland

© 2012 ISA Professional Development Project

May be reproduced for non-commercial purposes.

Booklet may be downloaded at [www.albany.edu/crsc/parents.shtml](http://www.albany.edu/crsc/parents.shtml)

Cover art by Laura Morrill

Note: To avoid the distraction sometimes caused by using both the male and female versions of pronouns each time an individual child is referred to (he/she, him/her), this document uses only one pronoun at a time but switches between the male and female versions in successive “questions.”

# Table of Contents

Introduction .....	1
1. How can I encourage my child to like reading? .....	1
2. What kinds of books should my child be reading? .....	4
3. My child brings books home to practice reading. But, she has already memorized some of them. What should I do? .....	5
4. My child seems to spend more time looking at the pictures than reading. What should I do? .....	7
5. My child does not want to sound out words she doesn't know. Should I insist that she do so? .....	7
6. What should I do when my child makes a mistake while reading? .....	8
7. Sometimes my child reads a word correctly on one page but can't figure it out on the very next page. Why does this happen? .....	9
8. Is it OK for my child to skip over words he does not know? .....	9
9. On some days my child seems to have more difficulty reading than other days. Should I worry about this? .....	10
10. Sometimes my child seems to have trouble reading a whole sentence without going back and re-reading parts of it. Is this a problem? .....	10
11. Sometimes, when my child is reading, he gets annoyed if I tell him a word he doesn't know. Why? .....	11
12. How much time should my child spend reading? .....	11
13. My child avoids reading. What should I do? .....	12
14. What kinds of things should I read to my child? .....	14
15. What can I do to help my child understand what he reads and what we read together? .....	15
16. Schools seem to be involving young children in more writing than I remember. Should I be writing with my child at home too? .....	17
17. My child uses "invented" spelling. Is this OK? .....	18
18. What can I do to help my child learn to spell more accurately? .....	19
19. My child sometimes mixes up letters like <i>b</i> and <i>d</i> , or words like <i>was</i> and <i>saw</i> . Does this mean she has dyslexia? .....	21
20. I have been told that my child is having difficulty learning to read. What can I do to help? .....	22



## Introduction

Your child is learning to read. This is an exciting time for both you and your child. If you are like most parents, you have questions about how to help. This booklet addresses some of the common questions and concerns that parents have. The questions often focus on how to help children learn to read the words. This is certainly important. But, it is important for parents to keep in mind that the purpose of reading is to understand what the words tell us. So, when reading with children, we want to be sure to help them understand and enjoy what they are reading.

We have organized this booklet by questions. You might want to begin by scanning through the Table of Contents to find the questions that most interest you. In addressing each question, we also offer some suggestions and ideas that you might find useful as you help your child grow as a reader.

### **How can I encourage my child to like reading?**

**BE ENTHUSIASTIC!!!** Share your love of reading and your excitement about your child's learning.

**Read and enjoy books together.** It is important to read **to** your child both before she begins to read on her own and as her reading skills develop. Reading to her will allow her to experience more complicated books than she can read on her own. It will also allow her to focus more on enjoying and understanding the book. Choose books, authors, and topics that she likes.



Discuss and enjoy the things you read. Some ideas to prompt discussion during and after reading include:

- Talk about what the characters are doing and why.
- Make guesses about what will happen next in the book and then read to find out if your thinking and/or your child's matches the author's thinking.
- Compare characters, events, and/or information from different books and people and events in your own life.
- Share your feelings about what happens in the book and ask your child to share her feelings as well.

**Read with your child.** When your child begins to read books on her own, be encouraging and enthusiastic. Listen carefully to her reading and help her when she gets to rough spots. Even though you may, at times, be surprised that your child has trouble identifying some of the words, be careful not to make her feel pressured or anxious.

**Avoid asking your child to read when she is tired.** For beginners, reading takes a lot of concentration and effort. Asking a tired child to read can lead to an unpleasant reading experience. If these unpleasant experiences occur often, the child might come to think of reading as being unpleasant (rather than reading while tired being unpleasant).



**Help your child understand the purposes for reading and writing.** To encourage interest in learning to read and write, help your child to understand that people use reading and writing every day and in all kinds of ways. A child needs to know that people read to get **information** AND for **pleasure**. Try engaging your child in reading and writing for everyday purposes such as: leaving/sending messages, making and using shopping lists, making plans, etc.



**Promote intrinsic motivation.** Motivation plays an important role in reading development and in learning more generally.



We want children to be “intrinsically” motivated to read – to want to read because of the pleasure and satisfaction that it brings, rather than because it is something they are required to do.

Many of the ideas offered in this booklet (such as being enthusiastic, giving your child some choices about what to read, and providing lots of opportunities for easy reading) will help to promote intrinsic motivation.

In addition, it is important to avoid offering rewards to your child for reading. We want children to see reading as a source of pleasure and as a form of entertainment, but rewarding children for reading can send just the opposite message. Instead of saying, “Let’s get your reading done and then you can watch TV.” (which makes reading a job and TV the reward), you might say, “Let’s get this room cleaned up and then we’ll have time for two books!” (which makes cleaning up the job and reading the reward).

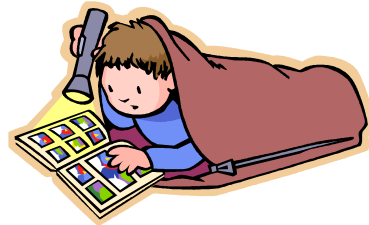
Praise can also help to promote intrinsic motivation. When praising your child for her reading, be specific and focus on her effort. Tell your child exactly what it was that she did well. For example, rather than saying, “Great reading!” you might say “I like the way you tried using the letter sounds and then you checked the picture to see if the word made sense.”



Encourage your child to think about how her reading is improving. It might also help to remind her of how easily she now does things (like walking or riding a bike) that once took a lot of effort. Help her to understand that this will happen with reading too ... the more she reads, the easier it will get.

## What kinds of books should my child be reading?

**Books he chooses.** Let your child have some choice in what he reads – even if he wants to read the same books over and over again. We are all more interested in reading things that we like.



**Easy books.** Provide lots of opportunity for your child to read books that are fairly easy for him, as this can make reading more enjoyable and help to build motivation for reading. When a child is asked to read things that are too hard, he can become frustrated and lose confidence. Your child's teachers and librarians can help you and your child make book choices that are right for him.



**More challenging books.** Sometimes, because he is interested in a topic, a child might want to read something that is a bit too challenging. In these cases, you can provide support by reading the hard parts out loud with him. Or, you might read the book to your child first and then listen to him read it.

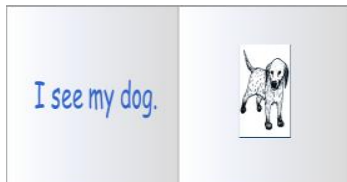
**Dictated Stories.** Many children enjoy telling stories or composing messages that someone else writes for them (or types on the computer). These stories can become long and involved and often include the child as a main character (for example, as the star of a sporting event or as the heroine or hero of an adventure story or fantasy). Often children are able to read these stories fairly easily even though they contain many words the child might not recognize otherwise. Stories the child has created are easier for him to read because he already knows the story line. After all, he is the author and so has a sense of what words to expect. Children





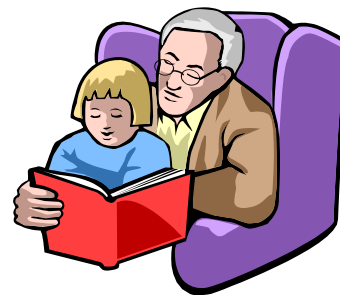
who enjoy writing/ dictating stories will often enjoy reading them over and over to family members and friends.

**My child brings books home to practice reading.  
But, she has already memorized some of them!  
What should I do?**



Children at the earliest stages of learning to read have a lot to learn about how print works. They need to learn things such as: in English, print goes from left to right, spaces tell us where one word ends and the next one begins, letters in printed words stand for sounds in spoken words, and so on. Teachers often use very simple books to help children develop these basic understandings. These books tend to follow a pattern, with many of the same words on each page (See the mouse, See the pig, etc.). The word that changes from page to page is signaled by the picture. These books allow children to focus their attention on learning and practicing some of the basic concepts about print without having to struggle to puzzle out all of the words.

When listening to your child read such books, keep the purposes of the books in mind. Focus on helping your child to point to each word as it is said. This will help your child to develop a “concept of word” and to understand that, for each word she says, there is a corresponding word on the page. Having your child point to the words as she says them will also make it more likely that she will begin to learn some of the **high frequency** words in the book (*the, is, like, and, was, of, etc.*).



**Note:**

**High frequency words** are words that occur very, very often in both spoken language and written materials. Teachers sometimes call these words “sight words” because it is so important for readers to be able to read these words quickly and correctly when they see them.

Children who are being asked to read books that follow a pattern are, generally, not ready to “sound out” words completely. In fact, for the earliest books they bring home, they may not be ready to use the letter sounds at all. However, **if** your child is beginning to learn letter sounds, you can encourage her to use what she knows to keep her place while reading. For example, if she knows the sound of the letter M, and she is looking at the word “mouse” in her book, you might encourage her to think about the picture and about what the first sound in the word will be.



In reading these beginner books with your child, it is also important to take every opportunity to talk about the story – which will often be told through the pictures.

On occasion, parents report that they have tried covering the pictures in these beginner books and/or have asked their children to start at the end of the book and read the book backwards. These practices can confuse children about the print concepts that these books are designed to help teach. Further, such practices are likely to frustrate children and may interfere with their reading progress.

## **My child seems to spend more time looking at the pictures than reading. What should I do?**

In books written for beginning readers, the pictures are often intended to help the child figure out words that he cannot yet read using other sources of information (such as the letters). Also, the pictures often provide the beginning reader with important information about the story that the words don't tell. Therefore, a child will understand the book better, and find reading easier, if he looks at the pictures carefully. Looking at the pictures is generally something to encourage.



## **My child does not want to sound out words she doesn't know. Should I insist that she do so?**

No. There are many words in English that cannot be “sounded out.” For example, “sounding out” the word ‘said’ would result in a word that is pronounced ‘sade,’ (rhyming with made, fade, paid, and braid) and sounding out ‘was’ would result in a word pronounced ‘wass,’ (rhyming with pass, class, and mass). So, thinking about the sounds of the letters will not, by itself, allow



the reader to correctly identify all of the words she comes across. Thinking about the sounds of the letters in the word will certainly help for most words, but there are other clues your child can and should use as well. For example, you might encourage your child to:

- **Check the pictures** – Often the pictures will provide clues about some of the words on the page.
- **Try to think of a word that would fit in the sentence** – Sometimes it is possible to figure out what an unfamiliar

word is by thinking of a word that would make sense in the sentence.

- **Read past the puzzling word** – Sometimes reading past the puzzling word will give the child a better idea of what the word might be.
- **Double check (Cross check)** – When you think your child has an idea of what the word might be, ask her to check whether the word she is thinking of:
  - fits with the letters in the word on the page
  - sounds OK in the sentence she is reading
  - makes sense in the story (poem, etc.)
- **Reread** – Going back to the beginning of the sentence and reading it through again can help the child to decide whether everything fits.

### **What should I do when my child makes a mistake while reading?**

When a child makes a mistake while reading, it is a good idea to let him continue reading to the end of the sentence. Often,



by then, he will notice the mistake because he will realize that the sentence doesn't sound right or make sense. When a child realizes this, he will often try to go back and fix the mistake. This is exactly what we want children to do. When your child begins to make these corrections you should recognize his problem solving success. For example, you might say: "I like the way you figured out that word!" or "You noticed that it didn't make sense and you went back and fixed it. You're really thinking like a reader!"

If your child reaches the end of the sentence and doesn't realize a mistake has been made, it is fine to point it out, especially when the mistake has changed the meaning of the

sentence or story. These mistakes should be pointed out in an encouraging way. For example: “I like the way you read, ‘She went up the...’). The next word gave you a little trouble. Let’s think about that word again.”

## **Sometimes my child reads a word correctly on one page but can’t figure it out on the very next page.**

### **Why does this happen?**



It is important to realize that beginning readers draw on a lot of sources of information to support identification of words that are not in their sight vocabularies. Sometimes these sources of information will work together well to help the child figure out the word and sometimes they won’t. Reading is a rather complicated process, especially at the beginning stages. Parents should try to avoid expressing impatience when difficulties like this occur. We do not want the child to feel frustrated or anxious about reading.

When a child reads a word correctly in one place but not in another, on occasion, it might be helpful to look back to the page where the word was read correctly and say something like, “When you saw this word here, you figured it out – which is great!” Encourage the child to reread the sentence where she correctly identified the word. And then, take her back to the page where the word was challenging and encourage her to try the sentence again.

### **Is it OK for my child to skip over words he does not know?**

Yes. It is often helpful for children to read past unknown words as this may give them a better idea of what the unknown word is. Often when a child is reading out loud, he will skip over an

unknown word and silently read beyond it. Children are often taught to use this strategy as one way of trying to figure out a word. Since learning how to use this strategy may take a while, be sure to give your child enough time to figure things out if he wants to try. Skipping over words is only a problem if the child doesn't go back to the skipped word to try it again.



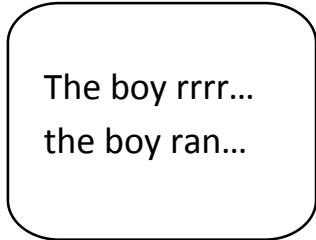
### **On some days my child seems to have more difficulty reading than other days. Should I worry about this?**



Do not worry. Your child may read very well one day and not read as comfortably the next. Why this happens is not clear, but it may frustrate your child when she experiences more difficulty than usual. Providing her with a little more help or picking an easier book to read that day should help.

### **Sometimes my child seems to have trouble reading a whole sentence without going back and re-reading parts of it. Is this a problem?**

Typically children go back and start over in a sentence because they are having some difficulty with understanding the sentence and/or with identifying the words in the sentence. Going back and starting over is a very good strategy for dealing with such difficulty and should be encouraged. For example, you might say: "I like the way you are trying to figure that out. Going back to the beginning of the sentence can help."



## **Sometimes, when my child is reading, he gets annoyed if I tell him a word he doesn't know. Why?**



For a beginning reader, figuring out unknown words can often be an enjoyable challenge, like solving a puzzle. If you tell the word too quickly, you may take away the fun. Therefore, if your child is working on figuring out a word, allow him at least 5 or 10 seconds to figure it out (or more if he doesn't seem frustrated). Be encouraging about his attempt even if the attempt is unsuccessful. For example, you might say, "That is a puzzling word, but I like the way you tried to figure it out."

## **How much time should my child spend reading?**



The more reading children do, the more quickly they will develop as readers. It is often recommended that beginning readers spend 15 or 20 minutes reading each day (in addition to the reading they do at school). However, the amount of reading a child does is most important, not the amount of time she spends doing it. So, if a child spends 20 minutes reading a book that is very challenging, she will read less (in terms of the total number of words read) than if she spends the same 20 minutes reading easier books.

While 15 to 20 minutes is the recommended amount of reading, it is important to note that, if your child is interested in and enjoying what she is reading, it is fine to encourage more time. However, we do not want children to become too tired. It takes a while for readers to build up the stamina they need to read for longer periods of time.



Note that beginning readers generally benefit from reading to someone and many will not be interested in reading alone. Finding time to listen to your child read every day is important. Also, especially at the early stages of learning to read, reading will take energy and concentration. Therefore, it will be helpful to find a time when your child is not too tired and a place where she can read without too many distractions (such as the TV or other conversations) going on in the background.



You do not always need to be sitting right next to your child in order to listen to her read. You can ask her to read while you are driving, folding laundry, preparing meals, etc. If she needs help with a word, she can simply spell the word out for you.

### **My child avoids reading. What should I do?**



There are several useful things that parents can do to help their children develop enthusiasm for reading. Many of them were addressed in previous questions. Here we briefly review those earlier suggestions and add others.

**Choose easy reading materials.** Children will enjoy reading more when they are able to identify most words easily and can concentrate on understanding and enjoying what they read.

**Provide both fiction and non-fiction reading materials.** Some children prefer informational (non-fiction, fact-based) books. Selecting books about things your child is interested in might just spark his interest in reading.

**Take turns reading to each other.** When an adult reads with a child, it creates a more enjoyable experience. The child is likely to want to read more, especially when reading a more difficult



book. When taking turns, the parent and child might read every other page in a book or the parent might read the entire book to the child first and then listen to the child read the same book.



**Talk about what is read.** Having conversations about the characters, events, and/or information in the books will help to encourage an interest in reading. Conversation can/should occur before, during, and after reading the book. And, discussions should be conversational, not test-like. Remember the goal is to get your child interested in reading and to view it as a form of entertainment. Recall conversations you have with other adults about your own reading. Think about how you've talked with your child about television shows or movies you've watched together and try to have similar kinds of conversations around books. For example, you might say things like:

- What do you think is going to happen?
- I bet he is going to...
- Look at his face! He looks... (mad, excited, confused...)
- What would you do if that happened to you?
- I liked the part where...
- Why do you think...?

**Read the same book more than once.** Many children enjoy, and benefit from, reading the same book over and over again. This can be a real confidence builder because the child is likely



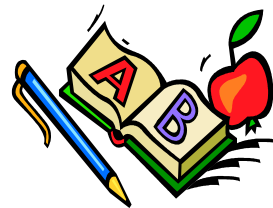
to find it easier and easier to read the book each time. When a text is easy to read, the reader is likely to read it smoothly and to sound more like a storyteller than like someone who is learning to read. The feeling of reading

smoothly also builds confidence. And, repeated readings can help children build their sight word vocabularies (the words that they can read without effort).

**Engage your child in playful practice activities.** Beginning readers need to learn lots of details about the workings of written English such as the names and sounds of letters and how to write them. When children become fluent (fast and accurate) with such foundational skills, they will be able to devote most of their thinking to making sense of the things that they read and to creating sense in the things that they write. Therefore, it can be helpful to engage them in some playful practice activities to help promote this fluency. A description of games and activities that can be used for this purpose can be found on our website: [www.albany.edu/crsc/parents](http://www.albany.edu/crsc/parents).

### **What kinds of things should I read to my child?**

**For beginning readers:** For children who are just beginning to learn about reading, alphabet books can help them to learn the names and sounds of the letters. Also, books with a lot of rhyming words, like many of the Dr. Seuss books, can help children learn to notice the sounds in spoken words. This will help them as they learn about how the letters in printed words are connected to the sounds in spoken words. Beginning readers will also enjoy and benefit from the kinds of books appropriate for all readers (see below).



**For all readers:** It is useful to provide children with access to a wide variety of written materials. Magazines, newspapers, books about history and science, poetry, song books and internet resources all have the potential to capture children's interests and to help them to develop both a fascination with

reading and the background knowledge upon which comprehension depends.

Finding books that are a good match for your child's interests can sometimes be a challenge. Librarians are generally very happy to help parents select books. We have also posted some links on our website ([www.albany.edu/crsc/parents](http://www.albany.edu/crsc/parents)) that can



be helpful in choosing reading materials.

As you read books (or other materials) to your child, be sure to engage her in conversations about what's happening in the book. Afterwards, leave the books you have read available for her to look at. Using the pictures, she is likely to be able to remind herself of what the book was about and perhaps some of the things she learned from the book.

**Books, Books Everywhere!** Having reading materials available wherever your child spends time will give her many opportunities to enjoy them.

### **What can I do to help my child understand what he reads and what we read together?**

Obviously, talking about the things that you and your child read together will help him understand what is read. However, there are other things you can do that don't even involve books that can help to develop your child's comprehension. Two of the most important things you can do are described below.

**Talk and listen to your child (a lot).** Reading is a language activity, and oral language is the foundation. Remarkably, research has shown that children's ability to understand what they read in middle and high school is related to the number of words in their spoken vocabulary in the early grades.

Reading to your child often and talking with him about what you read will certainly help to increase his vocabulary. However, conversations that occur throughout the day are also extremely important. Be thoughtful about the words you use



when speaking with your child. Using more sophisticated vocabulary in your day-to-day conversations will help to build your child's vocabulary. For example, you might use words like "scrumptious" and "feast" when talking about a meal, or words like "exhausted" and "fatigued" at bedtime.

**Help your child learn about the world.** As children move through the grades, they are expected to read and learn about things that go beyond their day-to-day experiences. The more your child knows about the world, the easier it will be for him to understand, and enjoy, the books that he reads.

While reading aloud to your child is a great way to build knowledge (and vocabulary), there are other ways as well. Watching educational television (such as shows on the nature and history channels), visiting educational websites (such as

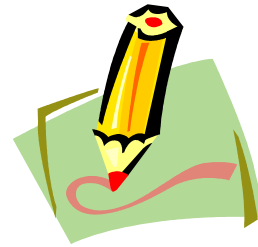
**[www.Kidsclick.org](http://www.Kidsclick.org)** and

**[www.nationalgeographic.com/kids](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/kids)**), and taking trips to museums and local places of interest will all help your child to learn more about the world. Of course, he will benefit most from these activities when you do them – and talk about them – together.



## **Schools seem to be involving young children in more writing than I remember. Should I be writing with my child at home too?**

Yes, writing is an important way to help children understand that print is a form of communication and to help them learn how the writing system works. Scribbling and drawing are the starting points for learning to write. With experience and some guidance from others, children generally begin to produce more mature forms of writing and, over time, they develop better understandings of how writing can be used. You can encourage this development by:



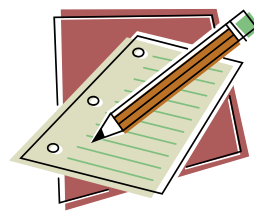
**Providing access to writing materials:** Make sure that paper and pencils are available in multiple locations such as in the child's room, the kitchen, and the car.

**Suggesting and supporting writing projects:** Sometimes children enjoy keeping journals or writing stories and illustrating them. Some children like to write and illustrate books that can then be bound by simply sewing or stapling the edges of the pages together. Early on these projects will be quite different from the conventional forms of writing that children will ultimately produce. Think of early attempts at writing as being a bit like the babbling that babies do before they learn to speak. We encourage babies' babbling and, through our enthusiasm and guidance, help them to gradually become better at communicating.

**Encouraging the use of writing for various purposes:** Some children will not want to write stories or other lengthy pieces. However, they might be happy to write things on a shopping list, make signs or labels, and/or address and sign their artwork, etc.

### **Writing to your child and inviting**

**answers:** When writing notes to your beginning reader, use mostly words that your child can read. You can add a picture above a word your child does not yet know. Keep the notes short and leave them in interesting places for her to find (lunch box, breakfast table, mirror, refrigerator, etc.).



#### **Note:**

Once your child begins to use letters in her writing attempts, do not expect or require perfect spelling at the early stages. Let your child experiment with writing and spelling and provide spelling assistance when asked.

### **My child uses “invented” spelling. Is this OK?**

Parents often wonder about when they should expect to see mostly correct spellings in their children’s writing. At the beginning stages of learning to read and write, children often spell words using only a few of the letters in the word and/or using letters that are not correct. They use letters to stand for the sounds that they notice in the words. This approach to spelling is called by different names including invented spelling, sound spelling, and temporary spelling.

Many parents worry that the use of this type of spelling will make their child a “bad speller.” While it is certainly true that prolonged use of primarily invented spelling might interfere with the development of spelling skills, the use of invented spelling in the early primary grades is actually quite helpful for children who are in the process of learning how to use the alphabet.



In fact, invented spelling supports the development of both reading and writing. This is true because it encourages children to really think about the sounds in the words that they want to write and about the relationships between those sounds

and the letters in printed words. Thinking about the sounds and letters in words helps to develop children's phonics skills.

When children first begin to use letters in their attempts at writing words, they usually use only one or two letters to stand for an entire word. However, as they do more writing, they begin to represent more of the sounds in the words they write and usually get to the point where it is possible for an adult to understand what they have written even though many of the words are spelled incorrectly. For example, this message: "I lik to swm in the oshin" (I like to swim in the ocean) can be read even though some words are misspelled. When children demonstrate the ability to spell in this way, they typically begin to move toward more conventional (correct) spelling.

We want children to learn to spell so that they can communicate in writing. Allowing invented spelling at the early stages encourages children to focus more on the communication aspect. They may attempt to write longer and more interesting messages when there's no pressure to write every word correctly.

### **What can I do to help my child learn to spell more accurately?**

There are many words in English that cannot be spelled correctly by simply thinking about the sounds and the letters. For example, words like *the*, *of*, *know*, and *to* are likely to be misspelled by beginning writers unless they have been



specifically taught to spell them or they have encountered them many, many times in their reading.

While parents sometimes urge schools to do a better job of teaching spelling, it is important to understand that it is simply not possible to teach children to spell the thousands upon thousands of words that a competent writer can spell accurately. In fact, most words that we learn to spell are learned through encountering the words multiple times during reading and through learning to use common spelling patterns (such as ight, oy, etc. which are often explicitly taught in school). So, extensive reading is important for spelling development.

Beyond encouraging your child to read, there are other things that you can do to help him with spelling:

**Encourage your child to use handy**

**resources.** If your child is writing about something in a book or is completing a homework paper, encourage him to find the correct spellings of words he wants to write. For example, if he is working on a homework paper in math and needs to write out an answer for a question like, “How many bowling balls were left?” he should use the spellings in the question and thereby avoid an answer like “Six bolin balz wr laft.”



**Encourage your child to use words he knows how to spell for ideas about how to spell words he doesn't know how to spell.**

For example, if he knows how to spell *night* and wants to spell *light*, you might point out the similarity. “It’s just like *night* except for the first letter.”

**Provide a list.** If your child frequently misspells common words that he “should” know, provide a short list of the correct spellings for him to refer to when he writes.



## My child sometimes mixes up letters like *b* and *d* or words like *was* and *saw*.

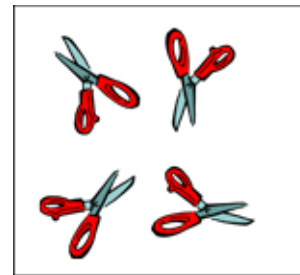
### Does this mean she has dyslexia?



No, this is not an indication that your child has dyslexia. These kinds of confusions are very common for children at the early stages of learning to read. The errors happen because some letters look a lot like other letters (for example, *b*, *d*, *p*, and *q*)

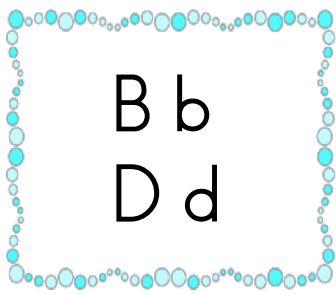
and some words look a lot like other words (for example, *was/saw*, *on/no*, *from/for*). It takes many children a while to remember which is which.

Part of the problem with remembering is that, until children start learning about print, just about everything they have seen is called by the same name no matter which direction it faces. For example, scissors are called scissors, no matter how they are oriented. This, of course, is NOT how letters and words work. So as they learn to read, children need to learn to pay attention to the direction of print.



As children have more experience with reading and writing, these kinds of confusions usually become much less frequent and generally disappear altogether. Parents can help children to get past this normal phase by providing gentle correction (for example, “That’s a *b*.”) when errors occur.

Note that most children who confuse *b* and *d* confuse the lower case versions only (again because they look so much alike and probably also because their names rhyme [bee, dee]). Because children tend not to confuse the uppercase versions of these letters, it can be useful to provide them with a B/D chart (see the example to the next page). When a child is unsure



about whether the letter she is looking at is a *b* or a *d*, and when she can't decide how to write the *b* or the *d*, she can simply refer to the chart.

With regard to the question of dyslexia, there was a time when it was widely believed that individuals who confused similar looking letters and words actually saw things differently and that they had “visual processing problems” that interfered with their ability to learn to read (the term dyslexia was used to describe such difficulties). However, scientific research has repeatedly shown that children who make these kinds of mistakes have normal visual abilities. They DO NOT see things differently (backwards). Rather, their difficulty is with remembering which letter or word is called by which name.

Today, the term dyslexia is used to refer to extreme difficulty learning to read words – when that difficulty continues even when the reader is provided with a great deal of extra help with reading. Fortunately, research over the last several years has clearly shown that early intervention for reading difficulties can dramatically reduce the number of children who experience such long term difficulties.

### **I have been told that my child is having difficulty learning to read. What can I do to help?**



Most children who experience difficulty at the early stages of learning to read do not experience difficulties over the long term. To try to ensure that early difficulties do not become long-term difficulties, it is important to make sure that the child receives extra help with reading in school. Additionally, provide the child with lots of non-stressful opportunities to

practice his developing skills at home.

Listening to your child read and talking with him about what he is reading are extremely important ways to support his development. Also, depending on what your child already knows and what he is ready to learn, there are a variety of game-like practice activities that can be used to help him practice such things as the names and sounds of letters and how to read and write high frequency sight words.

Descriptions of these games can be found at [www.albany.edu/crsc/parents.shtml](http://www.albany.edu/crsc/parents.shtml)

### **Some Final Thoughts on Helping Your Child Become a Reader**

You have probably heard the expression “Parents are their children’s first teachers.” This is absolutely true! It is also true that parents have a huge role to play throughout their children’s schooling. Therefore, it is very important to establish positive and productive relationships with your child when it comes to helping her learn to read as well as for other school-related activities.

With regard to reading, we encourage you to be an enthusiastic supporter of your child’s efforts as she practices her developing skills. Beginning readers need to coordinate many different sources of knowledge and skill. So, the more opportunities they have to do so with one-to-one guidance from a parent, the faster they are likely to grow as readers. The more enjoyable these opportunities are, the more likely it is that your child will develop a love of reading which can serve as an important foundation for success in school.

Special thanks to Deb Rutnik and all of the teachers who have attended workshops offered through the *Child Research and Study Center* and have added their insights and voices to this booklet.