

Reading with your child at home

Children are never too young and never too old to experience a parent reading to them at home. Here are some tips for making this an enjoyable and a valuable educational experience for your child.

For younger readers (3-7 year olds)

1. Talk together

Talking about words and pictures is really important for building up a store of vocabulary and confidence – and it's fun too. The words may be in the street, in a book, on-screen or on your ketchup bottle; it really doesn't matter so long as you talk about them together.

2. Read together

There is something very magical about sharing a book with a child. Just 5-10 minutes at bedtime, bath time or quiet time really does help to hook them in. And even your 7 year old will still enjoy the sharing if it's on offer...

3. Remember when...

Compare events in stories or information books with things you've done together, so your child starts to make connections between these things and their own experiences: *'That's just like when we went to Newbridge Park. Do you remember? Dad was scared...'*

4. Sing together

Even if it's not your forte, just sing. Nursery rhymes and songs for your youngest and chart-topping songs you hear on the radio for your 6-7 year old all count – and grandparents can contribute some golden oldies too!

5. New books but old favourites too

You'll notice that your child will want to revisit an old favourite over and over again and that's great (although may be not after the 64th time). But it's also important to build confidence by reading lots of different books at the same reading level too, and continue to re-read earlier books so that you aren't pushing up the difficulty of the read too quickly and causing frustration (to be avoided at all cost as your child won't make progress if anxious).

Older readers (7-12 year olds)

1. Talk together

Older children continue to need opportunities to talk with you about what they are reading or their reading interests. They may also be interested in what you are reading. Talking gives you both a chance to share and recommend.

2. Read together

There is never an age when this is not an enjoyable and useful way to spend 10 minutes a day – even your 11 year old will still enjoy the sharing opportunity if it's on offer. It's a great idea to get your older children to read with younger brothers and sisters too.

3. Revisiting favourites

It's important for children to know that it's OK to revisit old favourites and memories – even if this may seem like 'easy reading' – there's no mad rush to keep moving on, and we all like the comfort of a favourite book sometimes. Comparing and sharing memories of real life and books will help your child to develop empathy.

4. Sing together

Why not? Rhythm, rhyme, raps, advertising jingles or the latest top-rated downloadable track can all help the older reader to appreciate and use the patterns of language they hear in both their speech and writing.

5. Making choices

It's important to still visit book shops, libraries and places where your child can browse and chat with you about their interests. They'll start to prefer certain authors or series, or types of reading such as comics, magazines or websites, and with your encouragement, they can learn to make choices for themselves too.

Helping your child to choose the right book

It can be difficult, even as an adult to choose a book which you will want to finish. How often do we give up after a few pages? For children choosing a book which is interesting, reasonably challenging and not too difficult to read can be a real problem. Many fail and either give up quickly or trudge through the book without any enjoyment. The solution? - Children need to learn to P.I.C.K. the right book.....

It's all about teaching them one word that they can keep in their back pocket any time they're in the library or school media center. It's one word they can lean on when they're in the class book corner or at the book fair.

All they need to remember is P.I.C.K.

P.I.C.K. stands for Purpose, Interest, Comprehension, and Know the Words.

P = Purpose: We need to have children consider their purpose for reading. Why are they looking for a book in the first place? Is it totally a free choice, or is there some other reason for reading it?

In order to determine purpose, consider asking:

- Are they reading for pleasure?
- Are they trying to learn something?
- Is the book going to be read silently or out loud?
- Who is their audience?

Most often, purpose for reading can be found with a quick answer.

I = Interest. When choosing a book, it should be something of interest. With the many millions of books on shelves today, there's bound to be something out there for everyone. And emphasizing the interest connections is super-important as well. If the child is interested in cars, then don't stop at fictional stories about cars; consider books about racetracks, car construction, history of racing, racecar drivers, or car design. If it's magic that intrigues your daughter, then emphasize books about magic shows, magic tricks, and magicians; look for books that involve fantasy, science, and invention.

Even if children have a short amount of time to choose books, they can determine interest by:

- Looking at the front cover
- Flipping through the pages to glance at photos or illustrations
- Reading the back cover
- Reading the chapter titles

C = Comprehend. Is the book something that the child can comprehend? Can he or she understand what's read? Is it a book that is appropriate for his or her level or abilities?

Children are more aware of their reading "level" than we may think, so though we don't want to lean entirely on it, it's okay to remind kids that if they're choosing a book to read independently, and they read at a Level E (for example) that they should not choose a book from the Level M basket. Also, it's important to teach kids that if the book isn't labeled with a level, they can quickly assess if it's an appropriate book for them by opening the book and choosing a page – the book is appropriate for them if they are able to understand what they read.

Children can determine comprehension asking themselves:

- Did I understand what I just read?
- Do I remember what I read?
- Was I able to read most of the words?

This brings us to our final letter: K.

K = Know the Words. Readers should be able to decode -- or read -- and understand the majority of the words on the page. The key is to remembering the "Five Finger Rule."

The "Five Finger Rule" outlines a general idea of how many words a reader should be able to read on each page.

- 0-1 unknown words = book is too easy
- 2-3 unknown words = book is just right
- 4-5 unknown words = book is too difficult

Knowing P.I.C.K. is empowering for children. They want to know how to choose books that fit for them -- books that are enjoyable, fun, and exciting. It's all about giving them the tools they need to be strong, confident readers. Choosing the best book is the starting point.