

# **Learning To Read**

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*Learning to read is a complicated process and parents often wonder if their child is developing reading abilities at the rate they “should”. **Research** agrees, however, that **reading** (and writing) is very much a developmental process, which can look very different for different children, regardless of their age.*

*It can be very tempting to compare children of the same age in terms of their reading development. However, this is in no way a reliable indicator of how they should be reading at a certain age. Parents with multiple children can usually attest to the difference in their children’s reading abilities at similar ages.*

*Rather than judging progression by age, it’s important to think about learning to read as occurring in three stages.*

## **1. Emerging readers**

*Readers in the emergent stage of reading are usually those who are just gaining an understanding of how a text works. They will display good book handling behaviours, they will know where the book begins and ends and they understand that print and pictures convey a message. In this stage readers can usually recognise a small number of high-frequency words (5-20 words) that occur regularly throughout a text.*

*When your child is displaying these reading behaviours, you can assist them by pointing out environmental print (words on signs, around the home, at the supermarket), talking about the meaning of favourite books at bedtime and making links between these stories and the child’s own experiences.*

## **2. Beginning readers**

*In this stage of reading development, children are becoming much more familiar with different texts and usually start to read much more widely and independently. You may notice your child can identify many more high-frequency words (20 – 50 words) and they also begin to self-correct words as they are reading. While children may sometimes read slowly and word by word at this stage, they are still gaining valuable information from the text.*

*Parents that engage with their child at this stage of reading are assisting them best when they allow their discussions about the book to go a little deeper. Perhaps discuss what could happen next after the book is finished or explore different texts that the author has written.*

## **3. Fluent readers**

*Fluent readers, as the title suggests, are those who can identify most high-frequency words automatically. They tend to read from a wide range of different texts with little or no assistance. Readers at the fluent stage tend to use a range of different strategies to figure out unknown words, including skipping the word and allowing the wider context to convey the message, reading on for more information, and substituting the word with a word that would also make sense.*

*When you are reading with a fluent reader, it is useful to begin discussions about different types of texts, their purposes and the characteristics of how these texts are made up. For instance, when looking at **graphic novels**, you could talk about how the author uses images*

to represent different aspects of the story and the impact that text placement has on how this is displayed.

### **Some common questions from parents**

*In my work with parents, I am frequently asked many questions about how best to assist their children at various stages of their reading progression. Some of the most common questions are answered below.*

#### **What do I do when my child doesn't know the word?**

*There are a number of things that you can do when you are reading with your child and they come to a word they don't know. My first piece of advice is to avoid eye contact with the child.*

*When a child looks to us for help with a word, we often want to save them, help the reading process move along and provide the word. However, this is an unsustainable strategy for the child as they need a set of skills to call upon when they are reading with you. Rather than looking at your child, focus your attention on the book. After all, this is where all the clues are to figuring out the word.*

*Encourage your child to skip the word and read on for more information, use the pictures for a clue, or even leave the word behind and continue reading. By refocusing the child's attention back to the meaning of the text, the content of the text will help fill in the blanks. If your child has skipped the word and still can't figure it out, drop the word into the conversation as you turn the page.*

#### **Should I get my child to practise individual words they're having trouble with?**

*Learning words in isolation does not always translate to being able to figure out unknown words in texts. Consider learning the word duck: you could write this on a card for your child to learn, look at pictures of ducks when learning the word and talk about ducks that you've both seen at the park together. However, when your child reads the word duck in a passage about cricket, the meaning is considerably different.*

*The best way to learn words therefore is in context - in books. Point out interesting words that you encounter in the text after you've finished reading and think about where you've seen these before. Reading widely and frequently is the best way to build your child's vocabulary and increase their bank of known words.*

#### **My child spends too long looking at the pictures when they are reading; should I cover the pictures so they can concentrate?**

*No! A frequent misconception about the reading process is that when children are spending too long looking at the pictures they are getting distracted. When a child is looking at the pictures, they are gaining valuable information about the meaning of the text.*

*The clues that are visible in the illustrations are often the best way to figure out the meaning of the text. Encouraging your child to flick through the text before reading, or doing "**book orientation**", where you first discuss the book, its title and the pictures, is one of the best ways to help your child's reading progression.*