

Help your child read newsletters 1 – 10

The shading of the top butterfly indicates newsletter 1, the shading of the second butterfly indicates newsletter 2, etc.

This series of ten newsletters is designed for distribution to parents of children either beginning or in their first year of school. They are suitable for use by either classroom or specialist teachers.

The newsletters may be distributed to parents at regular intervals, e.g. weekly, fortnightly or monthly.

They are also suitable for discussion during parent information sessions or interviews.

While the newsletters have been written to follow each other sequentially, they may be distributed in any order or to address a particular need.

To allow for teacher discretion about which newsletters are distributed and in which order, the newsletters have not been numbered. However, to assist teachers in organising the newsletters and in monitoring which have been distributed and to whom, the position of a shaded butterfly in the left-hand margin of each newsletter is used to indicate the suggested order.

This series of newsletters provides suggestions and strategies that parents can use to support their children as they become readers. The focus is on sharing a love of books and reading, making time for reading and responding to beginning readers.

Titles of newsletters included in this series include:

1. Congratulations on teaching your child to speak! Easy wasn't it?
2. Develop positive attitudes to school
3. Read to your children – every day!
4. The importance of reading
5. Creating an environment conducive to language learning
6. Growing readers
7. Choosing and sharing picture books
8. What is reading?
9. Supporting beginner readers
10. Establishing a reading routine

I hope you will find the series useful in encouraging support for your beginning readers at home. Please contact me with any suggestions or feedback.

Happy teaching and learning,
Norah

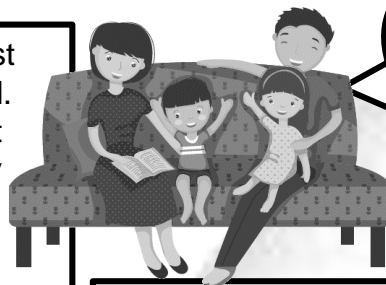
The butterflies in the right-hand margin will be used to indicate the sequence of a second series of newsletters 11 -20.

Congratulations on teaching your child to speak! Easy wasn't it?

By the time children start school some of their most important learning has already been accomplished.

- They have learned to walk and talk, to interact with others, and to recognise and name family members and friends.
- They know their way around their home and other places they frequent.
- They recognise features of their neighbourhood.
- They have acquired a great deal of knowledge about their environment and the world.

All this they have learned without formal instruction.



Did you know that parents are their children's first and most important teachers?

In their years before school you encouraged your children's learning by

- talking to them,
- playing with them,
- reading stories to them,
- giving them time and space to grow and develop at their own pace.

Starting school is not a time to stop doing all these wonderful things. Rather it's a time to work together with the teachers to help the learning continue by showing interest in what your children are doing and learning.



Encourage your children to ask questions

Children's questions are a systematic search for information about language. They learn nouns through 'What's that?' questions. 'Why' questions usually require a 'because' or 'if' response. These questions introduce children to more complex language structures and help them develop the ability to explain their thoughts.

Now that they have started school, with your continued support, teachers will guide your children through the next stages of their learning journey.

We congratulate and thank you for the foundations for learning already begun.

We recognise you as your child's first teachers.

We look forward to your support and continued involvement in your child's learning journey through forging a strong partnership between the school and home.

Develop positive attitudes to school

One of the most important ways parents can support their children's learning at school is by fostering positive attitudes to school and learning.

Children enter school with a great variety of experiences, abilities, interests and knowledge. The attitudes they have already formed about themselves as learners and to school will have an enormous impact on how well they adjust to the school situation and to learning.



Attitudes to help your children develop

- ☺ Encourage **confidence** and an “I can” attitude with a willingness to have a go and to not give up after a first attempt. Greater understanding can develop through repeated attempts than from immediate success that occurs without understanding.
- ☺ Encourage a willingness to **try new things**, to investigate and explore, and to ask and answer questions.
- ☺ Help your children to develop **friendship skills and empathy** by making them aware of the effect of their actions and how they affect the feelings of others.
- ☺ Have open discussions with your children about their feelings and help them to develop **resilience** by understanding that they can choose their feelings and do not have to be influenced by hurtful words or actions of others.
- ☺ Encourage your children to develop **persistence** by seeing difficult or unpleasant tasks through to the end.
- ☺ Help your children develop **organisational skills** of looking after and recognising their name on their belongings.

Your attitudes

- ☺ Celebrate who your children are, what has been already achieved and the learning journey about to begin.
- ☺ Show interest in what your children are learning at school.
- ☺ Communicate regularly with the teachers and engage positively in the school community.
- ☺ Continue to support your children's learning at home as you did before they started school by talking with them, reading stories to them, playing games with them and discussing their thoughts, dreams and ideas.

Have a firm belief and expectation that your children will learn; but be patient with their learning and don't expect it all to happen at once.

A positive attitude has a powerful effect upon learning.

Read to your children – every day!

A child's readiness to learn to read is dependent upon experiences with reading that have occurred in the years before school. Parents who engage in rich conversations with their children, who read to them every day, and who encourage a love of and an interest in books build a firm foundation upon which their children will learn to read.

Children start school with differing attitudes to reading. Many will be expecting to learn to read and some may already be reading. Children from homes in which reading is valued will have a more positive attitude to reading instruction in school.

Incorporating reading into your day is easy when it becomes a regular part of the routine. While the earlier this routine is established the greater the benefit, it is never too late to start. If you haven't already done so, NOW is the best time to begin.

Read together - don't give up the practice when children can read for themselves.



Continue to spend lots of time doing and talking.

ANYTIME IS READING TIME!

It's reading time!

- ☺ Involve the child in selecting the book.
- ☺ Make sure you are both comfortable.
- ☺ Ensure the child can see all the pictures as they assist the child to follow and predict the story.
- ☺ Talk about the cover, illustrations, and title before you begin.
- ☺ Sometimes run a finger under the print to show that the voice flows with the line of type.
- ☺ After reading the story, or during a natural break, talk about the story briefly without destroying the magic e.g. ask 'Why do you think he did that? I would have liked to see that, wouldn't you? What would you have done if . . . ? What would have happened if . . . ?'
- ☺ Don't try to teach, just enjoy!

Parents demonstrate that reading is valued in a variety of ways, including:

- reading for themselves as well as reading to the children;
- making books available for their children to read e.g. giving them as gifts or borrowing from the library;
- setting up special areas for storing books e.g. book boxes or book shelves;
- making a time for reading a regular part of the routine e.g. at bedtime, after lunch, first thing in the morning.

Reading is undeniably one of the most important skills children will learn.

The importance of reading

The ability to read is one of the most valuable skills we can acquire.

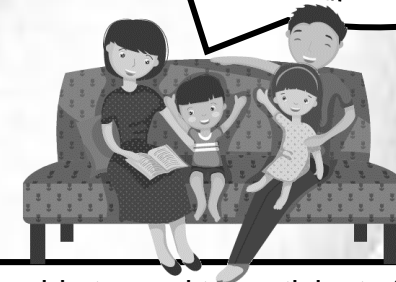
It is a tool for thinking, learning and entertainment.

Reading opens doors and minds; it gives us the ability to unlock the secrets of the universe and release our imaginations.

It is a skill that many of us take for granted, but without it the world would seem a more unfriendly place.

No wonder learning to read is a vital part of each and every school day!

And like everything else —the more you do it, the better you get



The enjoyment of reading is communicated only by personal enthusiasm and is one of the most precious gifts a parent can give a child.

Although we now have radio, television and the internet, it is still necessary to be able to read to participate fully in our society. The impact of the written word continues and increases. There is an abundance of all types of print materials, and our first decision is what to or what not to read.

Children who learn to read with ease are advantaged from the beginning with the acquisition of a skill that allows them to learn independently.

Because reading is such a fundamental and necessary skill, every effort should be made to help children develop it as soon as possible.

But reading is not just a skill to be mastered. It can give great enjoyment, stimulate discussion and lead to deeper understanding.

It is imperative to ensure that children's first reading experiences are interesting and enjoyable for, regardless of its importance, they will not read unless they enjoy it.

The aim of whatever we do is to prevent reading failure; and the best reading program, whether at home or at school, will provide opportunities to explore the widest range of books possible.

The love of reading is contagious. Pass it on today!

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read & learn

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Creating an environment conducive to language learning

Reading is a language skill, just as talking is a language skill.

The conditions under which children learn to read are the same conditions under which they learned to talk.

How do children learn to talk?

As parents, you require no advanced course in language to help children learn to talk. The environment in which children learn is filled with common sense and limitless affection.

You are positive and rewarding. You model language and have the expectation that your children will learn through trial and approximation. The children practise voluntarily and with a lot of repetition. There are no set exercises or drills. The children program themselves. They operate independently with what language they are using at the time; they monitor their own responses in self-corrective ways.

You did not consciously set out to 'teach' your children to talk. Your purpose was to help your children discover ways of making language. When you responded, you did not use baby talk, you used adult language: the sound, structure and meaning. You responded to what your children had to say, indicating whether it was appropriate to the situation or not. You did not emphasise any errors – you responded to the message.

Some specific ways in which your children learned to talk include:

- They were continually immersed in language – your talk, the talk of relatives, friends, radio, TV, signs, songs, reading aloud. You talked with them, read to them, sang to them and played games with them.
- They continually talked too and their talk was accepted and encouraged. You responded to the meaning of what they were saying and rarely corrected developmental “mistakes” (e.g. “comed”) because you knew that time and more talk would right it.
- They found talk to be amusing, rewarding, or in other ways meaningful. They learnt that talking can get things done. They played with sounds and found that some got more reaction than others (e.g. Mama / Dada).
- When they spoke their first single words, those words contained in them the meaning of a whole sentence which the context explained, e.g. ‘up’ might have meant ‘pick me up’, ‘I am up’, ‘I don’t want to be up any more’ or ‘The plane is up.’
- Before they were able to discriminate they may have called all four-legged animals ‘dog’.
- Learning wasn’t competitive. You allowed your children to develop in their own way, at their own pace, using language to meet their needs.
- You responded with enthusiasm to all efforts.
- You kept on talking, modelling appropriate adult language, not baby talk.

Principles for language teaching and learning

1. Immerse children in continual, varying language experiences
2. Encourage and accept children’s own language productions
3. Help children find purpose and pleasure in language activities

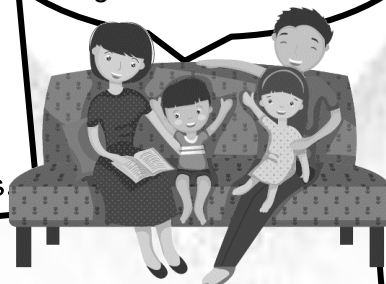
Growing readers

When children learn to talk, they match sounds and meaning.
When they learn to read, they match oral language and written language.

Before children can read, they need to know that:

- ❖ print can be turned into speech;
- ❖ a message is recorded in the print
- ❖ the picture is a rough guide to the message;
- ❖ some language units are more likely to occur than others;
- ❖ there is a particular message, of particular words, in a particular order;
- ❖ memory, or what the ear remembers, helps

There is no one point at which a child begins to read, it is a gradual evolution!



It is not easy to see what people are doing when they are reading.
For this reason children need to see the process of reading demonstrated in action. This can occur in a variety of situations, such as when they are being read a book on a lap, following the bouncing ball on a television commercial, having their questions about print answered, or when trying to write a message.

Our environment is rich in print: signs and labels, books and newspapers, television advertisements, computer menus. Children often begin to read by recognising print and signs in their environment. This is a natural learning experience which often provides the first sight words, an idea of left to right progression, sound-symbol relationship, and the purposefulness of print.

To help children develop reading behaviour:

- ☺ let them hold the book and turn the pages;
- ☺ show them where you begin reading;
- ☺ sometimes run your finger along underneath the line of print you are reading;
- ☺ show and discuss the front and back covers of the book;
- ☺ talk about the pictures, characters and what is happening;
- ☺ ask them to predict what the book might be about or what might happen next;
- ☺ explain any unfamiliar words;
- ☺ ask them to find a particular book on the shelf by title or description;
- ☺ ask them to locate the page that tells about e.g. a specific event or character;
- ☺ take turns to retell the story;
- ☺ sometimes leave out an occasional word for them to supply.

In the early stages of reading development children may:

- ❖ leaf through books, telling the story to themselves;
- ❖ recall the story and remember the words using pictures and other clues;
- ❖ begin to recognise some printed words.

They develop confidence in interacting with books, savouring the pleasure of a well-remembered story as well as the pride in having read it.

If a child shows an interest in words and print, respond to that interest. It is wisdom to enrich a child's experience.

Remember - The love of books and reading is caught, not taught!

Choosing and sharing picture books



During the preschool years books play a significant part in furthering a child's development. They continue to do so after children are at school.

Picture books:

- ☺ satisfy a variety of human emotions;
- ☺ provide an intimate shared experience between parent and child, to be remembered warmly;
- ☺ offer children access to vicarious experiences which help them grow and expand their view of the world;
- ☺ develop the reader's expectations that there are always connections to be made in literature;
- ☺ encourage children's language development through exposure to an abundance and richness of language;
- ☺ establish an understanding and appreciation of written language;
- ☺ offer pleasurable literary experiences.

The most successful and satisfying picture books are those which are meaningful and of interest to the child, which encourage thought and leave a lasting impression, and in which:

- ❖ the text and illustrations match and support each other
- ❖ the text follows logically, is cohesive and predictable
- ❖ the illustrations may add details to the story not told in words
- ❖ the illustrations provide an energy, beauty and power which the text alone may not have
- ❖ the language is rich and vivid
- ❖ there is a freshness and lack of cliché in text and illustrations

Some popular picture books for beginning readers include:

Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do you see? by Bill Martin Jr.
Green Eggs and Ham by Dr Seuss
The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle
Guess How Much I Love You by Sam McBratney
Where's my Teddy? by Jez Alborough
Go Dog Go by P.D. Eastman
We're Going on a Bear Hunt by Michael Rosen
Who Sank the Boat? By Pamela Allen
Rosie's Walk by Pat Hutchins
Dear Zoo by Rod Campbell
The Gruffalo by Julia Donaldson
Hattie and the Fox by Mem Fox

Adults can extend the pleasure of reading and help children develop insights by:

- ❖ encouraging children to share responses;
- ❖ alerting them to possibilities in the story;
- ❖ challenging them to make judgments and look for answers;
- ❖ helping them appreciate the techniques used by authors and illustrators.

The love of books and reading is caught,
not taught!

What is reading?



Reading is more than just saying all the words on the page in order. Reading is a process of getting meaning from print. It is a thinking process that uses language. It is a way of listening in to another person's ideas. The reader tries to find out what the author has to say. It is difficult to do this if one has a limited vocabulary, inadequate language understanding, or an inability to verbalise thoughts. It is also difficult to understand what is written if an understanding of the ideas that are being written about is lacking.

There is more to reading than what is written on the page. Reading requires the use of language and background knowledge, as well as sampling and predicting text. Effective readers use their knowledge of the world and of language in their quest to make meaning from the words on the page. Reading takes place when the reader understands the message of the writer.



Miscues are words that are read instead of the word on the page e.g. reading 'home' instead of 'house'. The reader has thought about what would make sense and looked at the first letter to predict the word. It is a miscue (cued from understanding and predicting), rather than a 'mistake'.

Effective readers use a combination of three cuing systems to predict and check what the author has written.

The use of these systems is obvious in miscues that readers make.

The most important cuing system is **knowledge of the topic**.

If you know lots about dinosaurs, you can read those big difficult-looking words and understand what they mean.

If you know nothing of legal jargon then even sounding out those big difficult-looking words won't help you understand.

The second system is **knowledge of language and grammar**.

We expect the words to flow with meaning and not be a jumble of nonsense.

The first two systems combine to **predict** the words on the page.

We then **check with the print** to ensure that our expectations were correct. For example, if the story is about a cowboy you may expect that he would jump on his pony, but when you look at the print, he actually jumped on his horse. Effective readers may say 'pony' instead of horse, but they definitely wouldn't say 'house' as it just wouldn't make sense!

Two prerequisites for reading development:

- ☺ the desire to read, and
- ☺ the ability to generate meaningful sentences about something of interest.

The conditions for learning to read are the same as the conditions for learning to speak.

Just as we learned to speak by speaking, we learn to read by reading.

Whenever an individual is making meaning from printed symbols, he is reading. The quantity does not matter.



Supporting beginner readers



From when your children first start to read, you can support their development by encouraging them to use the strategies and systems that effective readers use:

Engage their interest and help them to use what they already know by looking at and discussing the pictures and talking about the book. You could even read the book to them first. Remember, it is much easier to read about something you already know about!

Encourage them to have a go at reading and to think about what would make sense and sound right.

Support whenever necessary by quietly reading along with them, or telling any unknown words.

Remember, you are supporting their development, not testing them!

Continue to use these strategies as their reading develops but help them to become more independent in working out words for themselves. Initially you may need to suggest strategies they can use, but as their confidence increases you will notice them using strategies independently. Acknowledge their attempts and development.

Effective reading strategies

Finding the cues!

If your child is unsure of a word, you can encourage them to work it out for themselves by cuing them into the clues.

Suggest they:

Think about what would make sense, and

- ☺ Look at the picture;
- ☺ Get their mouth ready for the word (say the first sound);
- ☺ Go back to the beginning of the sentence and re-read;
- ☺ Leave the word out and read on to the end of the sentence.

If they still can't get it —just tell them!

Miscues

If your child reads something that doesn't make sense but continues reading – stop them and ask:

“Does that make sense? What could it be?”

Encourage them to go back and find the clues.

If they read something that doesn't make sense and they realise and self-correct: praise them! They have independently monitored their ability to maintain meaning! What effective readers!

But it makes sense!

If your child reads an incorrect word that makes sense, don't stop them. Let them read on to the end of the sentence, paragraph or book.

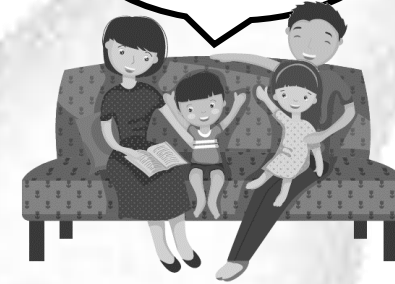
Sometimes you can just ignore it. Sometimes you can praise them for maintaining meaning: “Well done! What you read made sense.” but encourage them to look more closely at the word and see what it would be. If they still don't get it – just tell them.

Have fun! Enjoy the experience! Be a listener, not a tester!

Establishing a reading routine

Often times parents will be asked to listen to their children read at home. This activity provides opportunities for children to show off as well as practice their developing reading skills. This is best done in reading sessions that remain enjoyable for all, and positive and encouraging for the children.
Listen to enjoy, not to test.

Listen to enjoy,
not to test!



Patience is of utmost importance when listening to a child read. We need to respect the pauses and silences, resist the urge to interrupt, and encourage children to be persistent and have a go. If we prompt at every pause, and correct every miscue, the child will not learn to monitor the meaning of their own reading.

When preparing to support a reader, it is useful to:

- ❖ establish a routine of time and place, and
- ❖ keep the session brief.



During the reading session:

- ☺ Talk about the story first e.g. discuss the cover and illustrations, and the relevance of the story to the child's experience to generate both interest and language about the topic.
- ☺ Respond as a listener not a tester. Listen to enjoy the story, not to pick up every mistake that's made.
- ☺ Be supportive and praise every achievement e.g. trying hard, guessing intelligently, reading with enthusiasm or expression, finishing a chapter.
- ☺ Remain patient.
- ☺ When your child stops at an unfamiliar word, say it – or tell the child to keep reading – or count to 10 quickly and then give the word – or urge the child to guess from context using the first letter as a clue – but don't insist on sounding out – and remain patient.
- ☺ Make sessions enjoyable and rewarding.

Be patient!