

How to support a reluctant or struggling reader.

Please talk to your child's teacher if you are concerned about your child's progress or attitude to reading. Sometimes it can be something simple like not enjoying the style of book they have or even they need an eye test. However sometimes children lose confidence and begin to have a negative attitude towards reading.

Here are a few ideas to support your child if you feel they are struggling.

At home it's really important to cultivate a reading environment, where children have access to books. Parents and carers can be a great reading role models by letting your child see you reading and reading actual books rather than just on your phone.

Reading can be tiring for children who find it difficult, and this can put them off reading for pleasure, especially if the sort of books they'd like to read are just too tricky. Reading together and taking it in turns to read a paragraph or page is a good way to help your child practise their reading without getting too exhausted by it.

Children who struggle with reading can also struggle with self-esteem. But the ability to learn from your mistakes is a real asset. Try modelling mistake-making yourself, pretending to get a word wrong and then working it out.

It can be hard to know what to do if your child gets stuck on a word. Sometimes, you might want to just to tell them what it is, for example if they're getting bored or frustrated, or if it's a particularly difficult word. But on the whole, it's best to give them a little time to work it out for themselves, before prompting them to use their phonic knowledge or the picture clues on the page.

Reading to the cat or dog, or to a younger sibling who can't yet read, is a great way for your child to practise their skills without pressure. There is something very comforting about reading out loud without the fear of being judged for children who can struggle.

Children are much more likely to read for pleasure – and so develop their skills – if reading is seen as cool or popular.

Try to provide books which interest your child. Speak to your class teacher who will be able to provide some school books on a topic your child wants to read about to help encourage them. Being able to choose books independently is an important goal for children who are struggling to read, whether that's at the library, in a bookshop or online. If your child chooses a book that appeals to their interests or links to their experience, they're more likely to persevere with it. A good rule, when choosing a book, is to open it at random. Get your child to hold up five fingers, and put one down for every word on that page that is too difficult. If they use up all five fingers, the book is likely to be too advanced for them.

There are lots of great reading games and apps for smartphones and tablets, and audiobooks are also great because they develop an understanding of how written language differs from spoken.

Some children simply aren't enthused by fiction, but that doesn't mean they're destined never to read for pleasure. Non-fiction books, comics, magazines and graphic novels are perfectly valid reading materials; all reading practice is good practice.

Try to make time for just 10 minutes' reading each day aloud to or with your child. Research shows that reading aloud to your child is one of the most important things you can do to encourage both their reading ability and their enthusiasm for books.

Reading is more than just being able to decode the words; your child also needs to understand the plot. Talk to your child about what they're reading. Ask them what they've been reading at school. What's the book about? Are they enjoying it? Who's their favourite character? This will not only help their comprehension, but your interest will also act as an encouragement.

We never grow out of being praised, so make sure your child gets due credit for their reading. Try to keep your frustration or impatience off your face and out of your tone of voice, and make sure you celebrate their reading victories. Be specific about what they've done well: 'you sounded that word out perfectly' is much more effective than 'well done!'

If you or your child is getting fraught or impatient, bring the reading session to an end: persevering when it's going badly risks them developing a negative attitude towards reading.

Join the local library. They run schemes that incentivise reading, such the Summer Reading Challenge, which children enjoy taking part in.