

Parents with High Expectations

Promising Practices: Helping Your Child Read and Understand

In order to be a good reader, your child must be able to do two things:

- 1) make sense of, or “decode,” the words on the page; and,
- 2) understand what the words mean when joined in a sentence.

Early reading instruction focuses on teaching a child how to read single words, but being good at reading single words is not the only skill your child needs. Once your child has become good at decoding and reading single words, he or she needs to learn to read easily, becoming an effective reader.

Good readers have moved beyond decoding single words well. They can understand what they are reading. This is the ultimate goal for reading.

- Good readers read quickly and accurately.
- They can read with expression.
- They tend to separate sentences into groups of words based on the meaning.
- They also tend to read many individual words automatically.

It is hard to understand what you are reading when you are not a good reader. Researchers believe that everyone has a limited ability to pay attention when learning a new task. So, if your child needs to use a lot of attention to decode or read single words, there is little left over to use for understanding what he or she has read. Once decoding or reading single words becomes automatic, attention can then be turned to meaning. Good readers can begin to enjoy the meaning of what they read. They can move beyond learning to read. Then can now read to learn.

Ask your child’s teacher about your child’s reading level. Your child will be ready to work on becoming a good reader when he or she is reading at the 2nd or 3rd grade level. If your child is working to become a good reader, there are some things that you can do to help.

Encourage your child to do more reading.

Research tells us that the best way to become a better reader is to spend more time reading. Anything you do to encourage your child to spend more time with the printed word will help make him or her a better reader.

- Reading aloud to your child while he or she watches the page is helpful.
- Have your child read to you every day for ten minutes.
- Turn on the captioning while your child is watching TV.
- Write simple notes to your child.

The more your child reads, the more automatic reading will become. Try to be creative with reading material. Keep in mind that ANY reading is better than no reading.

Reading new materials or re-reading familiar materials helps to improve reading.

Researchers have tried to figure out what types of reading material are best for improving reading. Reading seems to improve based on the amount of time spent reading. **It does not matter whether this time is spent reading new things or re-reading favorite selections.** If he wants to, allow your child to re-read his favorite book more than once. It may not be interesting to you, but it is helping your child to become a better reader.

Read aloud not only to your child, but *with* your child.

Research has shown that you, as the parent, can serve as a good model of a good reader for your child. Read out loud together with your child. Have your child read aloud to you every day.

Let your child pick something interesting to read. At first, you will take the lead and your child will follow you. Point to the words as you pronounce them. Read clearly and with expression. Go at a pace that is comfortable to your child. Let him or her follow along with your voice and point to the words that you are both saying. If your child wants to read alone, let her. Step in when she struggles over a word. Pronounce the word correctly and begin reading aloud together at the start of that sentence.

This combines your child's senses of vision and hearing with the motor activities of speaking and pointing. Done on a regular basis, this activity can help your child make big gains in reading. While it is not always as effective as reading with a person, some children will be able to benefit from the activity of reading out loud with an audiobook. An audiobook is the voice recording of the text of a book that you listen to rather than read. Audiobooks are available in many neighborhoods at the local library.

Good fluency instruction includes learning about the rhythm and expression of our language.

You, or the voice of the speaker on an audiobook, are a role model for reading with expression. By listening to expressive reading at a good pace, your child is learning how to group words into meaningful phrases. Good skill at rhythm and expression help readers understand and enjoy what they are reading.

For more information

You may want to check out the resources of Reading Rockets at readingrockets.org/audience/parents.

You also can call PACER Center at (952) 838-9000 and ask to speak with PACER staff who work on the **Parents with High Expectations Project**.

PACER is a Minnesota nonprofit organization. It supports the educational rights of children with and without disabilities. It offers workshops, individual assistance, written information, and more.

