

Overcoming Reading Barriers

Closing the Gap

As literate adults, we sometimes undermine our phenomenal capacity to read. 33% of all U.S. fourth graders lack basic reading abilities. Childhood reading struggles are actually more prevalent than we think, and this is a multidimensional issue that we must tackle as parents. Some blame this disparity on social challenges and poverty. However, most reading disabilities stem from a lack of necessary building blocks that every child requires.

The learning gap between good readers and poor readers can usually be detected in kindergarten. Most children who struggle to read lack foundational knowledge when they begin grade school. A child who begins school with certain fundamental language concepts has a much better ability to grasp new information.

Building a Foundation with Phonics

As a parent, you are presented with a prime opportunity to armor your child with fundamental knowledge before he/she enters kindergarten.

Prior to sending your child into the grade school environment, expose your child to the complexities of vocabulary, comprehension, context, sound, and word meaning.

One of the most integral components of reading is that of word sound, or phonics. Not only does each letter have a distinct sound but several letters have more than one sound and even imitate the sound of other letters. For example, the letter “C” functions differently in the words “carry” and “cent.” The vowels have both short and long sounds. Compare the words “apple” and “ace.” Another aspect of phonics that your child must understand is that of letter combinations such as “sh,” “th,” “ea,” and “ou.”

When your child begins to grasp these nuances of sounds, he/she will be better equipped to read proficiently. One of the reasons some children lag behind in reading is that they are unable to sound words out properly. The English language is very complex and it is imperative that your child have a thorough understanding of phonics in order to become a fluent reader.

Vocabulary and Comprehension

As a parent, you have an incredible opportunity to facilitate a solid reading foundation for your child. One effective means of doing this is exposing your child to new and “bigger” words. Do not underestimate your child’s ability to comprehend words. Children love the sound of unusual words. Make a conscious effort each day to introduce new words and their meaning to your child. Once your child has built a sufficient vocabulary, this will give rise to a flurry of different abilities. First of all, it will increase the speed of word recognition on paper, and sounding out words will come more naturally. This will also improve the fluency of your child’s reading aptitude.

Finally, the vocabulary aspect of language will aid your child in the realm of reading comprehension, enabling your child to better understand the use of words in different scenarios.

Reading Exercises

Teaching a child with a reading disability requires patience, time, and effort. Introduce new concepts gradually without flooding your child's brain with complex language rules all at once. Consider the following exercises:

- 1) There are many facets to reading - fluency, phonics, comprehension, vocabulary. Introduce them in order of increasing difficulty. Teach these concepts in a logical order. For example, it might make sense to begin with phonics.
- 2) Help your child to understand word combos and patterns so he/she can sound words out.
- 3) Allow your child to read different types of text every day.
- 4) Teach your child at least one new word per day, and ask your child to use it in a sentence.
- 5) Build your child's reading comprehension level by allowing your child to interpret the meaning of small, basic paragraphs.

Resources

Alphabet Anatomy's Meet the Capital Letters is a fun way to introduce your child to the alphabet letters and provides an effective visual and audio method for easy recall of not only each letter's sound and shape, but also how to write it. Alphabet Anatomy is a great way to begin teaching your child the basics of phonics. Future titles in the Alphabet Anatomy series will expand on more advanced reading and writing concepts. <http://www.alphabetanatomy.com/>

Rock with the letters in this fun video! <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hxxZsC-70jg>