

Becoming a reader

Children learn about reading through handling and sharing books, listening to stories, talking about pictures and by seeing others reading. Gradually they come to understand that written words mean something and can be spoken out loud.



Linking written words to spoken language

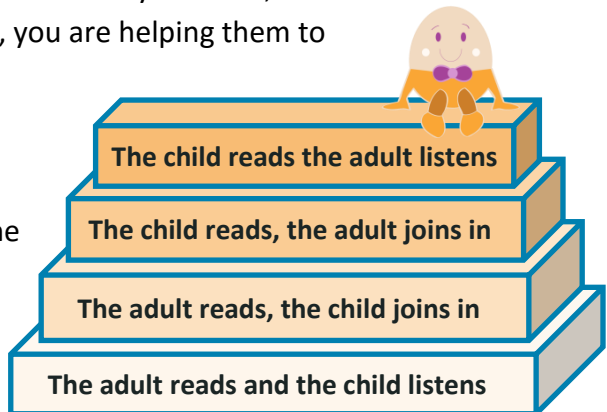
You might have noticed your child joining in with familiar words and phrases from favourite stories, or pretending to read books – perhaps to themselves or to their toys. This shows that they are learning about how and why we read – they are beginning to recognise that written words carry meaning and that they can represent spoken words.

This is an important part of becoming a reader and happens long before they are able to read and understand the words on a page.

Becoming a reader

Every time you share a book with your child, or talk to them about any words and pictures, you are helping them to become a reader.

Learning to read is a gradual process with each step supporting the next. It begins when you read and your child listens. Over time they will start to



join in, perhaps with remembered words and phrases.

Gradually, as children become familiar with letters and sounds, they will begin to work out simple words, and eventually they will read while you listen.

Continuing to read, listen and join in together will help your child to develop the skills and understanding they need to become confident and independent readers.

Every time someone reads them a story, children learn a little more about what it means to be a reader.

As children become more familiar with sharing books, they will learn that written words carry meaning and can be 'decoded' into spoken words. They will also learn about the shapes of letters, the sounds they represent and how they blend together to form words.

By the time that children can read on their own, they will:

- understand that print flows in a particular direction and that pages in a book follow on from each other
- know about the shapes of letters and that each letter or combination of letters can be linked to sounds
- be able to blend the letter sounds in a written word to make the spoken word that carries meaning
- understand that pictures often provide clues which help to decode the written word



It takes children a *long* time and a *lot* of practice to develop the understanding and skills they need to become readers.

Decoding words

Part of being able to read involves learning about letter shapes and sounds. Once children begin to understand that letters or combinations of letters represent individual sounds, they can start to use this knowledge to decode written words.



Hearing rhymes, rhythms and patterns of sounds in words when they are reading stories, poems or singing songs and rhymes helps children tune in to the different sounds in their language.

Older children may recognise the shape and sound of a beginning letter – particularly if it is important to them, such as the first letter of their name.

Children need *lots* of opportunities to read and *lots* of practice.

‘Reading’ pictures

Children can often work out what is happening in a story by ‘reading’ the pictures. This is a useful skill as they often provide clues which can help to decode the text written alongside.



Talking to your child about what they can see in pictures and asking them what they think might be happening will help them to develop these skills. It can be interesting to see whether the text agrees with your interpretations – if not, you’ve just created another story!

Sometimes children enjoy sitting by themselves and looking at books - turning the pages, looking at the pictures and remembering the story. When this happens, children have started to become readers – opening up the magical world of books.

Helping children become readers

Here are some of the things that help children to become readers - and some ideas for how you can support your child:

Things that help children become readers	Things you can do to help
An interest in reading	<p>Explore a wide variety of reading materials together – especially about things your child will find interesting.</p> <p>Involve them when you are reading, such as when you are checking ingredients for a recipe.</p>
Having the confidence to join in and ‘have a go’ at reading	<p>Recognise your child's efforts with praise, encouragement and support – even when they don't get it ‘right’.</p>
Being able to ‘read’ pictures	<p>Talk to your child about the pictures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What can they see?</i> - <i>What do they think is happening?</i>
Being aware of sounds in words	<p>Sing songs and rhymes, share poems and enjoy the repetitive language in books and stories – <i>I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down!</i></p>



When children recognise that written words can carry interesting information they are more likely to want to become readers themselves.