

K15

Reading Comprehension — Research Informs Us

The goals of reading are to understand written text, integrate new ideas, and generalize from what is read. As a parent, what should you know about reading comprehension to help your child improve his skills and achieve those goals?

Develop Decoding Skills

Your child can't understand what he's read unless he has a way to figure the words out. Research has shown that poor readers "guess," an inefficient way to approach new text. Good readers, however, use decoding skills.

Phonemic awareness precedes learning to read print. Your young child needs to be able to hear speech sounds of the language and tell them apart, isolate sounds, and break words up into separate sounds.

In order to build decoding skills, your child needs to be able to match those sounds to letters of the alphabet and blend the sounds to make words. This is phonics instruction.

Increase Fluency

If your child struggles as he sounds out each word, he'll have trouble remembering what he's read by the time he comes to the end of the sentence or paragraph. So once he's learned how to decode words, he needs to read quickly and fluently to remember and understand what he's read.

In order to achieve this goal, he requires many opportunities to read out loud. Research has shown that practice in oral reading, not silent reading, makes the process of reading effortless. So take time to listen to him read aloud and help him through the difficult words.

Expand Oral Language

For most kids, listening comprehension develops at a faster speed and remains at a higher level than reading comprehension. Your child can't understand what he's read unless he understands the material when it's read aloud to him. In order to decide whether reading makes sense, your child needs well-developed oral language skills, including:

- **Learning the meaning of new words.** The larger his vocabulary becomes, the easier it will be for him to relate words to the context of the sentence, paragraph, or story. His vocabulary continually increases in complexity as he converses and reads. You can help by introducing new words and explaining the words he doesn't know.
- **Studying word parts and changes in the inflection of words.** If your child knows the meaning of a root word ("kind"), then he'll know what the new word means when the prefix ("un"/not) or suffix ("ness"/state of being) is added. He also needs to see that meaning changes when word pronunciation changes, e.g., "I took a birthday present to the party, and I will present it before the cake is served."
- **Understanding meanings and relationships between words.** Synonyms are words with the same or similar meanings ("bucket/pail"), and antonyms are opposites ("good/bad"). Your child may need help learning figures of speech, such as, "It's raining cats and dogs," in order

