

How to Help Your Struggling Reader

Reading the words from left to right can be a difficult task for struggling readers. Often the words appear to move around or the space between words is unclear. It helps to use a finger or a card underneath the words to help your eyes track and focus on each word and letter you are sounding out. This will train your eyes to focus on the word you are reading instead of skipping around looking for other clues to simply guess at the word. Those who struggle with reading often have many amazing strengths such as building things, putting puzzles together, abilities in art, drama, music, and they are very creative. Make sure to focus on those strengths and allow them experiences and success in those areas. In order for someone to improve fluency, reading must become automatic. This happens when they are able to see the word and quickly identify the patterns and sounds. This can be accomplished by teaching the person the patterns of English (Five Phonetic Skills) and how these patterns affect the vowels; the more they work with these patterns they will develop this automatic orthographic reading ability and their fluency will increase. When you approach a word you do not know it helps to look through it, identify the vowels and decide what they are saying before you sound out the word (this helps if you know the phonetic skills to prove the vowels). Once you know the vowel sounds you have the hardest part done! Then sound out the word from the beginning all the way to the end without stopping or guessing a couple of times and you will get it! (Taken from the Dennis Davis Reading Method © 2006)

One of the best comprehension strategies is to make a connection with what you are reading. Can you relate to any of the characters or the story? If you make a connection to yourself it is called text-to-self connection; if you make a connection from the story you are reading to another story you have read it is called text-to-text connection; and if you make a connection to something you have seen on the news or an experience someone you know has had it is called text-to-world connection. The more connections you make the better you will remember and comprehend the story. Asking questions is another great reading comprehension strategy. If you ask questions about what is happening in the story, a character's feelings, or wonder what will happen next, you will be engaged in your reading and that will help you understand on a deeper level. When your sounding out a word and you are having a hard time, check to see if there are any "C"s or "G"s followed by an "i" or an "e". Remember that those vowels change the sound of "c" and "g" to their soft sound as in the words *city*, *cent*, *gentle*, and *giraffe*. (Taken from the Dennis Davis Reading Method © 2006)

If your child recognizes a word on one line and not on another, this could be an indication of a phonological weakness known as dyslexia. The best thing to do is observe your child and see if this is a pattern that happens often when he reads. Be patient. It is just as frustrating for them that they don't recognize the word as it is for you. Help them sound it out and look for the vowel sound(s) and patterns in the word. Remember, someone who has dyslexia must see a correct representation of the word almost 30 times more than the average reader in order for it to be stored into long-term memory! Remember, when you or your child encounters a new word to look up the meaning of that word. If you attach meaning then you are more likely to remember it and be able to decode it. After you decode the word practice writing it and using it in a sentence. Many people who struggle with reading have low self-esteem and feel stupid. They may have been called "stupid" or "lazy". All research has been conclusive in proving that difficulty with reading has nothing to do with intelligence. If you know someone who feels this way, then know that their reading struggles have nothing to do with their intelligence and they simply need to be taught in the way their brain learns. This can be one of the most empowering pieces of information they ever receive. ... "That's the real problem with kids who struggle with learning ... Some kids feel like they're stupid. I want them to know that they're not. They just learn differently. Once they understand that and have the tools to learn in their individual way, then they can feel good about themselves."

-- Charles Schwab "Automatic word recognition, which is dependent on phonics knowledge, allows readers to attend to meaning, likewise, slow belabored decoding overloads short-term memory and impedes comprehension." --Louisa C. Moats of the American Federation of Teachers

When writing or taking spelling tests if you will say the word you are writing out-loud two times, you are better able to feel the sounds you are making in your mouth and voice box and catch all the phonemes that you might miss by simply hearing the word spoken. Those who struggle with reading and processing language also have a difficult time processing spoken directions and have a difficult time with organization. One of the best strategies is to encourage the person to make-up checklists outlining each step of a particular task. This is why a phonics program must be systematic and simple—it must progress logically for the learner in order to have it make sense and have them retain the information. If you are working with someone who has a processing disorder such as dyslexia, remember that they often need more time to complete tasks. It takes a great amount of effort for them to concentrate so intensely when reading and processing language—allow them the time they need and be patient. There is a buzz-word in education called "invented spelling," which basically means that the child is not required to spell correctly but allowed to express themselves freely and creatively unencumbered by spelling rules. It comes with the best intentions: "When a first grader picks up a pencil and musters the courage to write his very first sentence, you're not going to harp about the misspellings." But allowing this free-form spelling method for right-brained children beyond the beginning stages of reading and writing can have disastrous consequences. Because right-brained children have such a good visual memory, they may have difficulty relearning the correct spelling. There must be a balance, and giving them a strong phonetic and spelling foundation will help ensure future reading success. Those who struggle with reading are often also easily distracted. They are highly sensitive to stimuli and change their attention with each new sound or movement.

It is best if they sit away from high traffic areas such as doors leading out of the classroom or near the teacher's desk where students are constantly coming and going. The front of the room is optimal so that they are as close to the teacher as possible in order to help eliminate interference when trying to listen to instruction. Reading is an intense activity for some and requires them to create their own stimuli to help increase brain waves to match up with the task at hand. Students often do this by wiggling around, bouncing their foot, or tapping their fingers. Let them. It actually helps their concentration for the task instead of hindering it. "Children with high ability typically are independent, self-directed, willful, dominant nonconformists. These children are not passive--they are often difficult to be around because they want to "run the show." Yet this same quality also makes them most interesting and stimulating to be around." --Ellen Winner, *Gifted Children* Using these tools and suggestions you can ensure success for your struggling reader. Success leads to greater self-esteem, which provides hope that creates joy and opens doors for these students to ensure their future happiness and success.

About the Author

Shantell Berrett holds a B.A. in English Teaching and specializes in dyslexia. She became passionate about this field when discovering her son was dyslexic.

Source: <http://www.edarticle.com>