

Three easy ways to get your kids to read better and enjoy it

It's little wonder that we often feel as though our kids aren't as successful with reading as we'd like them to be. The "[reading wars](#)" - the battle between sounding out words and using the sentence as context for understanding - have seemed only to add unnecessary stress and anxiety for parents, carers and teachers alike. The feelings of helplessness in regard to reading often translate into less-than-productive reading experiences with children and the transfer of parents' stress and anxiety onto their children.

No parent ever sets out to purposely do the wrong thing when it comes to their child and reading. Whether it is through daily reading, flash cards, and sight words or sounding out words, many parents are simply doing what they did as children. I suggest shifting focus from a [phonics](#) (sounding out) only approach to reading for pleasure as a sure-fire way to re-engage kids with books.

Picking up a book and reading and encouraging your child to do the same is one of the easiest ways to re-engage children with reading. The tips below encourage just that – reading as fun and as an act of love.



1. Relax



The simplest way to encourage children to engage in reading is to relax around the process. Parents are often anxious when they feel that reading isn't going as well for their children as it should be. This then translates to the children that they are reading with.

One of the easiest ways to relax around the reading process is to change the location reading takes place at home. If the difficult reading times have always been at the dining table, then encourage a variety of reading locations. Try lying down on the lounge room floor, Mum and Dad's bed, or outside under a tree.

The physical location can make a real difference to how the reading is perceived and enjoyed. Most importantly, as Paul Jennings suggests, don't listen to reading while you are doing the washing up. Make it a time that is quiet, safe and warm.

2. Don't be a word pointer or an 'instant word factory'

The core of the reading process is making meaning. When a child changes a word in the text, they are being a resourceful reader. They are working towards making sure that the text that they are reading makes sense for them.

The child who reads the word flu instead of cold is putting the text into their own context. As adults, we frequently miscue when reading, though often we are unaware it has happened. Children need to know that it is okay to not read “word perfect” all of the time.

Unfortunately, prior reading experiences for many of us have stressed the importance of reading “word perfect” and have implied that to do otherwise is cheating in some way. When a child changes a word, or looks to a parent for help, the importance of making meaning needs to be shared. Simple prompts for parents, such as “what would make sense here?” or “let’s read on for more information”, give the reader a strategy to figure out what they are reading.

Getting stuck on a word in many cases results in pointing at the unknown word and sounding out, or the parent becomes the “instant word factory” and supplies the word to the child. Both of these strategies are unsustainable. When figuring out unknown words, sounding out is the least effective strategy because the clues aren’t in that word – they are in the rest of the sentence or the pictures.



3. Children always need to choose what they read

Book choice is a vital component of the reading process. As adults, we very rarely read anything that we either don't love or enjoy. If we read a book and it takes a while to get going or we lose interest, we simply put it down or lend it to a friend. Why then do we insist that children must read cover to cover something that they don't necessarily enjoy or like?

Often these imposed choices on children come from a place of love – we are trying to support the children in accessing a text that is at their reading level. It is often hard to let go and let children choose their own books. This is vital, however, for developing strong, self-sufficient readers.

