

Promising Practices—Fluency: Helping Your Child Read and Understand

In order to be a good reader, your child must be able to do two things at the same time:

- 1) decode the words on the page and
- 2) understand what the words mean.

Early reading instruction focuses on teaching a child how to read single words. But being good at reading single words is not the only skill your child needs. Once your child has become good at decoding single words, he or she needs to learn to read easily, becoming a fluent reader.

Fluent readers have moved beyond decoding single words well. Fluent readers read quickly and accurately. They can read with expression. They tend to separate sentences into groups of words based on the meaning. They also tend to read many individual words automatically. They can understand what they are reading. This is the ultimate goal for reading.

It is hard to understand what you are reading when you are not a fluent reader. Researchers believe that everyone has a limited ability to pay attention when learning a new task. So, if your child needs to use a lot of attention to decode single words, there is little left over to use understanding what he or she has read. Once decoding single words becomes automatic, attention can then be turned to meaning. Fluent readers can begin to enjoy the meaning of what they read. They can move beyond learning to read. Then can now read to learn.

Ask your child's teacher about your child's reading level. Your child will be ready to work on becoming a fluent reader when he or she is reading on the 2nd or 3rd grade level. If your child is working to become a fluent reader, there are some things that you can do to help.

Encourage your child to do more reading.

Research tells us that the best way to become a better reader is to spend more time reading. Anything you do to encourage your child to spend more time with print will help make him or her a better reader. Reading aloud to your

child while he or she watches the page is also helpful. On occasion, turn on the captioning while your child is watching TV. Write simple notes to your child. The more your child reads, the more automatic reading will become. Try to be creative with reading material. Keep in mind that ANY reading is better than no reading.

Reading new materials or re-reading familiar materials both help improve fluency.

Researchers have tried to figure out what types of reading material are best for improving fluency in reading. Fluency seems to improve based on the amount of time spent reading. It does not matter whether this time is spent reading new things or re-reading favorite selections. If he wants to, allow your child to re-read his favorite book one more time. It may not be interesting to you, but it is helping your child become fluent.

Read aloud not only to your child, but *WITH* your child.

Research has shown that you, as the parent, can serve as a good model of a fluent reader for your child. Read out loud together with your child. This is sometimes called choral, paired or assisted reading.

Let your child pick something interesting to read. At first, you will take the lead and your child will follow you. Point to the words as you pronounce them. Read clearly and with expression. Go at a pace that is comfortable to your child. Let him or her follow along with your voice and point to the words that you are both saying. If your child wants to read a bit alone, let him. Step in when he struggles over a word. Pronounce the word correctly and begin reading aloud together at the start of that sentence.

This method is multisensory: it combines your child's senses of vision and hearing with the motor activities of speaking and pointing. Done on a regular basis, this activity can help your child make big gains in fluency. While it is not always



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as effective as reading with a person, some children will be able to benefit from the multisensory activity of reading out loud with a recorded book-on-tape. Books-on-tape are available in many neighborhoods at the local library.

Good fluency instruction includes learning about the rhythm and expression of our language.

You or the voice of the speaker on a book-on-tape is a role model for reading with expression. By listening to expressive reading at a good pace, your child is learning how to group words into meaningful phrases. Good skill at rhythm and expression help readers understand and enjoy what they are reading.

As a parent, you can help your child become a better reader. You can do this by making reading fun and surrounding your child with text. Remember, as a developing reader, your child must do more than learn to decode the words on the page. Your child must also learn how to understand what he or she is reading.

For more information —

Kuhn, M.R. & Stahl, S.A. (2000). Fluency: A Review of Developmental and Remedial Practices. CIERA Report #R2-008, Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement.

Available in print from: CIERA/University of Michigan, School of Education, 610 E. University Ave., 1600 SEB, Ann Arbor, MI 48109, 734-647-6740 voice; Web site: www.ciera.org.

Available online at www.ciera.org/library/reports.

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