

Use these tools to renovate reading



Help your child succeed with these resources

Raising readers is like doing renovations on your house: There is a difficult and emotional balance between trusting the craftsmen with something so precious and taking responsibility yourself for making sure the needed improvements are completed to your high standards. As with home improvements, even if you are not an educator, there are many tools of the trade available to help either your children or those you volunteer to help. When handling the job over to a more experienced, trained and educated professional, you still can remain involved. From the choosing of who will do the job, to keeping an eye on the work-in-progress, to making sure in the end that it was completed to your specifications, your involvement is no less important than that of the professionals doing the work.



Checklists for problems

Doing the work yourself and getting outside help are two sides of the same coin. Some things parents and nonprofessionals can do; other things are best to contract out. Since early detection of reading problems is so important, the following list offers some early signs of potential problems:

Preschool at-risk list

- Late talking
- Trouble making self understood
- Trouble counting
- Trouble following simple directions
- Trouble learning the alphabet
- Confusing opposites

Kindergarten at-risk list

- Trouble rhyming words
- Trouble hearing four words and telling which does not belong
- Trouble naming all letters
- Trouble pointing out words starting with each letter
- Trouble identifying the sound at the beginning, middle and end of words
- Trouble dividing a word into individual sounds
- Trouble blending four sounds and telling the word

Elementary at-risk list

- Trouble reading as fast as classmates. Even slightly slower can affect understanding.
- Trouble pronouncing words when reading aloud
- Misreading when reading
- Skipping words and letters
- Trouble reading quickly and accurately at the same time
- Trouble understanding typical vocabulary
- Trouble answering questions at the end of a chapter

Get Help

If there are potential problems, flip to the professional side of the coin. First, check with your pediatrician for hearing, vision, and other health issues. Next arrange for educational testing. Evaluations may be provided by public schools if students meet certain criteria. If you do not agree with the results, prefer faster results, or want different information, schedule testing through a private learning center with a school psychologist.



Keep a Watchful Eye

Supervising the work is important. Tests should require silent and oral reading. Comprehension, basic sight words, and phonics should be tested separately. Also, though the concern is reading, knowing the IQ is useful for comparison. It is expected that reading level is reasonably close to IQ. If there is not a big difference between reading level and IQ, the school will probably not have a program for your child. But that does not mean help would not be beneficial.



Tools

Flipping back to the do-it-yourself side, the following is a sample of tried-and-true ways to help build a solid foundation for good reading habits.

Read to and with your child. With easy books, the old "You read a page then I'll read a page," can work wonders. Also, read books aloud that are too difficult for your child to read to expose higher-level vocabulary and train the ears to hear the rhythm and nuances of written language.

Help your child keep up with cultural literacy. *Cultural Literacy* or *What Your Third Grader Needs to Know*, both by E.D. Hirsch Jr, are good resources. Hirsch wrote separate books to help many grade-level students become culturally literate.

Watch videos of classic books. This helps children keep up with characters and plots of commonly known classics.

Add \$500 Gift from the Governor to your Toolbox

Sally E. Shaywitz, author of the well-received *Overcoming Dyslexia*, warns that 74% of students behind in reading at third grade never catch up. She also makes clear that intensive intervention at any age can make a huge difference.

Fortunately, for PA residents, the Department of Education offers \$500 for every student scoring below the average range (50th percentile) in reading or math. The \$500 will be given to parents (including stepparents and foster parents) to pay for after-school help. Here are some key guidelines:

"Offers \$500 for every student scoring below the average range (50th percentile) in reading or math."

Kindergarten through ninth-graders scoring below the 50th percentile on either the PSSA tests or the achievement tests are eligible.

Students must receive help at times other than regular school hours. Verification is needed by the school.

Return the completed application to the Department of Education for processing, approval and finally the issuance of a grant certificate to take to an approved tutoring location. Remember to make a copy of anything you send. Begin tutoring services at a state-approved location within 60 days of receiving the grant. For a list of approved programs, check the Web site:

www.classroomplus.k12.pa.us/providerlist.htm

To Wait is to Risk

When noticing cracks in your foundation, do you wait to see if they get bigger before taking action? Research is crystal-clear. If a child is even somewhat behind expectation, you are taking an unnecessary risk with his or her academic success and self-esteem waiting to see if he or she gets further behind and begins to get, at best, frustrated and, at worst, fails.

Help for a kindergartner is different from help for a third- or ninth grader. Nevertheless, you can do quite a bit at home, and that may be sufficient. Otherwise, obtain help from school, a tutor or learning center. Whatever you decide is best for your children, do it now to maximize their ability to prepare today for success tomorrow.

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