

Literacy Seminar

with Sheilah Currie

- **sight words** are high frequency words like “is”, “the”, “look”, “and”, “for”, etc. (*See sample page of sight words*)
- neither phonics nor the whole language approach is superior — **balanced literacy** (a combination of the two) is actually how children learn to read best

When is your child ready to start reading?

- A quick way to check is to write the numbers from 1 to 10 in a line (with spaces between) and have the child point to each one while correctly saying that number. This is called **one-to-one matching**. It’s not a foolproof way of knowing whether the child is ready to read, but it’s a good indicator. If the child cannot yet do this, wait a while and be patient.
- Children do not need to know all of the alphabet letters and sounds to start learning to read.

What is the parent’s role?

- Parents do not need to formally teach reading—the schools can take care of that. Rather, the parent should keep it fun and informal at home to instill a love of reading.
- Reading new books can be scary for the emerging reader, and mistakes can be embarrassing. A parent will do the most good if she provides ready support and reassurance so the child will experience success.

Levelled Readers:

- Levelled books are expensive (\$10 per book) and are only available through educational publishers/schools.
- Levelled books for emerging readers are not found in libraries or book stores. The commercial publishers carry books that are dubbed ‘beginning readers’, but they use a different levelling system than that used in schools, and are too complex for kids who are first learning to read. Some characteristics of books used in education at the early levels:

Level 1 / Level A:

- story is patterned and predictable
- large font with good spaces between words
- one line of text, with a high ratio of sight words
- art contains good **picture clues** (e.g., if text reads: “The baby is sleeping”, eyes should be closed!)

Level 2 / Level B:

- two lines of text may be introduced, and the sentence pattern changes slightly (e.g., “One kitten is coming.” “Two kittens are coming.” “One kitten is going.” “Two kittens are going.” etc.

Level 3/ Level C:

- Text is less patterned and predictable
- More lines of text on the page
- Speaker tags are introduced (“said Mom”, “said Baby Bear”)

AVOID:

- saying “sound it out” to emerging readers: this is overused and young children really can’t understand it — they don’t yet have the necessary phonics skills to decode a word in this way. From time to time, you can talk about the sound that a *first letter* makes, but don’t expect your child to go through the whole word.
- quizzing the child unless you are fairly sure he/she knows the answer — being ‘stuck’ on an answer and making errors will embarrass and discourage the child
- interrupting the reading to teach — sacrificing the pace of the story will take the fun out of the reading experience

DO YOUR BEST TO:

- read easier books at home than at school
- most commercially available children’s bedtime/story books are for adults/older children to read to younger children
 - point this out to your child so s/he knows s/he isn’t meant to be able to read these books
- before your child reads a levelled book, take a brief **picture walk** to discover clues to the story. This gives your child the best chance of success and improves comprehension.
 - tell the child the characters’ names
 - discuss what you and your child think the story is about based on the pictures
 - where relevant, talk about how the story relates to the child’s own life/experiences; this will tweak her/his interest and assist with comprehension
 - at some point, ask your child to predict what will happen next in the story
- reassure child before EVERY reading attempt that you will help with any tricky words
- at Level 1 (Level A): show the child how to point to each word as s/he reads it aloud by gently guiding his/her finger. If s/he doesn’t want to do it, just read the story to your child.
- focus on what the child did right even though your natural inclination is to notice the errors
- be specific in your praise (e.g., “Good job. You made it sound just like talking.”)
- children can often fix their own mistakes:
 - wait 3 seconds after a child has made an error to see if s/he fixes it
 - even if the attempt is wrong, praise the child for getting the sound of the first letter in the word, for instance, or for guessing an answer that makes sense, then supply the correct word
- if child is stuck on a word:
 - after no more than 3 seconds tell him/her the word so you can move on and not lose the flow of the story — avoid embarrassing silence/getting stuck
 - ask what the first letter sounds like, then say “good” or “good try” and supply the word (e.g., child gets stuck on “little”, parent says “what does the first letter sound like?”, child makes “L” sound, parent says “Yes, that word is “little.”)
- make it memorable — be silly and fun! — best learning may be one-off moments:
 - dad uses fridge magnets to make a small sight word during meal prep (e.g., “is” and then moves them apart and has child try it)
 - mom makes “the biggest letter ‘S’ in the world” in the sand at the beach, or with sidewalk chalk on the driveway, and child walks along it
 - make a collection of word cards with all the words your child knows (start with his/her name)
 - with your finger, trace an “L” on your child’s back and ask him/her to guess which letter it is, then let your child trace a letter on your back