

Parent Involvement in Reading

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About This Column

Parents play a key role in their children's literacy development and school success. To support educators in building positive working relationships with their students' parents, this column offers practical suggestions to promote parent communication, involvement, and partnerships.

Information and Ideas for Parents about Fluency and Vocabulary

Parents often have questions about reading instruction. They may wonder why some skills are important and how they can support their children's reading development at home. This column focuses on two key reading skills: (1) fluency and (2) vocabulary.

Fluency

What Is Fluency?

Reading fluency is the ability to read a text easily. Reading fluency actually has four parts: (1) accuracy, (2) speed, (3) expression, and (4) comprehension. Each part is important, but no single part is enough on its own. A fluent reader is able to coordinate all four aspects of fluency:

1. *Accuracy*

Reading words correctly is a key to developing fluency. Children need to be able to read words easily without having to stop and decode them by sounding them out or breaking them into chunks. When children can

accurately and easily read the words in a text, they are able to think about what they are reading rather than putting all of their effort toward figuring out the words. To read a text fluently, a child should be able to read almost all of the words easily. In fact, a goal of fluent reading is for the child to read at least 98 out of 100 words accurately and easily. Accuracy combines with the other three parts of fluency to produce fluent readers.

2. *Rate*

When children read fluently, they read at an efficient rate. This means that they read quickly. Rate does not mean that children should read as fast as they possibly can. Rate needs to be combined with accuracy, expression, and comprehension to produce fluent reading. Some schools provide a target rate for students in each grade level, usually as the number of correct words read per minute. You may wish to ask your child's teacher if there is a rate goal used for your child's grade level. Those rate targets are important, but they are not the only goal for fluency. For example, if a child reads very quickly but does not read with expression or understand what is read, that child is not reading fluently.

3. *Expression*

Expression in fluency refers to the ability to read in a way that sounds like spoken language. This means that the child uses

appropriate emotion to read aloud, pauses for periods and commas, and emphasizes important words. Expression also shows that the child understands what is being read.

4. *Comprehension*

Fluency is the bridge between being able to read (or decode) words and to comprehend or understand what is read. The real goal of reading fluency is to help children read a text with ease so they can focus on understanding what they read. The human brain is amazing, but it can only handle a limited number of tasks at the same time. If a child is struggling to identify words, the child's brain must focus all of its energy on figuring out words rather than understanding what is read. When the child is able to combine accuracy, rate, expression, and comprehension, that is reading fluency.

What Can Parents Do to Promote Reading Fluency at Home?

Here are 10 quick and easy activities parents can do to help their children build their reading fluency at home:

1. Reading and rereading easy books is a great way to build your child's reading fluency. Have your child select a favorite book and read it aloud two or three times. This approach, called repeated reading, is one of the best ways to promote reading fluency.
2. Model fluent reading for your child by reading aloud daily. Be sure to use expression in your reading. You can even use funny voices for dialogue as you read aloud.
3. Echo reading helps to build reading fluency. You read a phrase, sentence, or paragraph aloud to model fluent reading. Your child then reads the same phrase, sentence, or paragraph afterwards, like an echo. Continue this pattern until you have read a book, story, or page of text with your child.
4. Have your child practice reading a simple book to share with a younger sibling or another young child. Once your child is able to read the book fluently, ask him or her to share it with the other child. Both children will benefit from the reading experience.
5. Poetry and nursery rhymes can be used to practice fluency. Take turns with your child reading a short poem or nursery rhyme until he or she can read it fluently.
6. Use paired reading to build reading fluency with your child. First, you will read a poem or short passage to your child. Then, you and the child will read the poem or passage together several times. Finally, have your child read the poem or passage to you. A great book to use for paired reading is *You Read to Me, I'll Read to You: Very Short Stories to Read Together* by Mary Ann Hoberman or any other books by this author.
7. Review basic sight words with your child to make sure that he or she knows these words automatically. Knowing these common words on sight will help to improve your child's reading accuracy and rate. For lists of basic sight words and online sight word review games, visit the Learning Abilities Books website: www.learningbooks.net/Dolchflash.html.
8. Choose a comic strip from the newspaper. Read the comic strip aloud, using expression. Then, ask your child to read the comic strip aloud. This is a fun activity to do at the breakfast or dinner table with the daily newspaper.
9. Have your child practice reading a text aloud while riding in the car or on the bus. Your child will stay busy and entertained, and this extra practice can make a big difference in your child's reading fluency.
10. Set aside reading practice time every day. Even five minutes of reading fluency practice using any of the activities listed above will help to develop your child's reading fluency.