

Tips to Improve Reading Comprehension

Good readers are **active readers**. When your child has a hard time understanding what she reads, instruction can help. Here are some strategies to try.

1. Make Connections

Connecting what your child already knows while she reads sharpens her focus and deepens understanding. Show her how to make connections by sharing your own connections as you read aloud. Maybe the book mentions places you've been together on vacation. Talk about your memories of those places. Invite your child to have a turn. Remind your child that good readers make all kinds of connections as they read.

2. Ask Questions

Asking questions will make your child want to look for clues in the text. Pose questions that will spark your child's curiosity as you read aloud. Frequently ask her, "What are you wondering?" Jot down those "wonderings" and then see how they turn out. Remind your child that good readers challenge what they're reading by asking questions.

3. Create "Mind Movies".

Creating visual images brings the text alive. These "mind movies" make the story more memorable. You can help your child do this by reading aloud and describing the pictures you're seeing in your own imagination. Use all five senses and emotions. Invite your child to share her "mind movies." Notice how they're different from yours. You might even ask your child to draw what's in her imagination.

4. Make Inferences.

We "infer" by combining what we already know with clues from a story. For example, when we read, "Her eyes were red and her nose was runny," we can infer that she has a cold or allergies. You can help your child with this reading skill by predicting what might happen in the story as you read aloud. Then invite your child to do the same.

5. Figure out what's important.

Determining what's important is central to reading. When you read a story with your child, you might download a "story element" organizer. You can use it to keep track of the main characters, where the story is taking place, and the problem and solution of the story. Nonfiction texts look different from fiction. They're organized with features like the table of contents, headings, bold print, photos and the index.

6. Monitor Comprehension.

Readers who monitor their own reading use strategies to help them when they don't understand something. Teach your child how to "click and clunk." Read together and ask her to hold up one finger when the reading is making sense (click) and two fingers when meaning breaks down (clunk). To repair the "clunks," use these "fix-up" strategies:

- Re-read.
- Read out loud.
- Look at illustrations.
- Read on—now does it make sense?
- Read more slowly.
- Identify confusing words.

Use a PEER When You Read Aloud

The best story times are very interactive: You are talking about and reading the story, your child is talking, and there is conversation taking place between the two of you. Because of all the talking, this type of shared reading is often called dialogic reading.

Parents can use the PEER method to help them remember a few important ways to read in this interactive way:

P: Prompt your child with a question about the story. Prompting your child focuses attention, engages the child in the story, and helps the child understand the book.

Point to something in the picture, for example, a balloon. "What is that?"

E: Evaluate your child's response.

"That's right! That's a balloon."

E: Expand on what your child said.

"That's a big, red balloon! We saw one of those in the grocery store yesterday."

R: Repeat or revisit the prompt you started with, encouraging your child to use the new information you've provided.

"Can you say big, red balloon?" Each time the book is reread, the expanded vocabulary words are verbalized again.

Dialogic reading works. Children whose parents read in a dialogic way have better oral language skills, and are more likely to be exposed to new words.

Don't feel obligated to use the PEER procedure on every page, with every book. Keep it fun! Use PEER when it fits and when your child is engaged with the story.

