

Q&A: How parents can set children up for reading success

March 11 2024, by Jill Pease



Dr. Laurie Gauger talks with students in her Speech Pathology Language Disorders class. Credit: Betsy Brzezinski

One of life's greatest pastimes may be settling in with a terrific book. In honor of March's National Reading Month, Laurie Gauger, Ph.D., an

assistant clinical professor of speech, language, and hearing sciences at the University of Florida College of Public Health and Health Professions and director of the UF Reading Program, shares tips for parents on building children's reading and language skills, and signs that indicate a child may have dyslexia or another reading disability. With the right support and interventions, young children can become skilled and confident readers.

How can parents foster children's reading skills?

The skills that support a child's ability to learn to read actually begin at birth with the development of oral language, which becomes the foundation for reading and writing. Parents should talk to their children constantly, starting in infancy. They should read books with them, talk about the pictures in the book and what's happening, and point out the names of objects.

All this will help children develop oral [language skills](#), making them more ready to learn to read when they start school. Other ideas include playing word games, rhyming and reciting nursery rhymes. These tasks make the child more aware of the [different sounds](#) in words and how words can be similar, such as rhyming words like cat, bat and hat.

Also, families should have lots of books in the home and parents should let their children see them reading. Parents should make reading fun by going to the library and getting books on topics their child is interested in.

What are signs that a child may have a reading disability?

In preschool children, this may include difficulty learning nursery

rhymes, learning certain sounds or using language effectively. Mispronouncing familiar words, difficulty learning the letters of the alphabet or recognizing the letters of their own name may also be signs.

For an older child, such as those in kindergarten or first grade, not being able to match sounds with their appropriate letters while learning to read simple words may be an indication the child is having difficulty learning to read. In addition, if reading errors seem to have no connection to the word, meaning the child is just guessing when they're trying to read instead of trying to decode the word, that may be another sign.

A family history of reading difficulties in a parent or sibling also places a child at higher risk of developing a [reading disability](#).

Dyslexia, or specific learning disability in reading and writing, manifests primarily in reading and spelling difficulties. In contrast, children with a language learning disability have difficulties in both oral (speaking and listening) and written (reading and writing) language.

Why is early intervention important?

Early diagnosis and intervention is critical to help all children make the most gains. If we can identify a child by kindergarten when they're not so off the typical developmental sequence, we can limit the impact of their reading disability so that a 5-year-old who has trouble learning the alphabet doesn't progress to having trouble learning the sounds that go with letters in order to read simple words at age 6. Or at age 7 has limited sight-word vocabulary that could end up affecting their reading fluency and reading comprehension.

By fourth grade, children are no longer learning to read in the classroom, they're reading to learn. So if they're not ready to make that transition, their reading problems are going to affect how they perform in math,

science and social studies.

We can also limit social and emotional repercussions by addressing reading difficulties early. Making sure that children who struggle learning to read don't experience a feeling of failure, which can lead to a lack of confidence and giving up, is critical. This is why early identification is very important. We have ways to identify children with these problems and we have interventions that work.

What resources are available for parents seeking additional information or support?

The UF Literacy Institute offers programs and resources to help educators teach children to read. The Florida Center for Reading Research at Florida State University is a really great resource for parents and teachers that provides information on identifying reading difficulties in children along with things teachers should be doing in the classroom and parents can be doing at home.

The International Dyslexia Association offers a lot of information on signs and symptoms of dyslexia, getting a proper diagnosis and evidence-based reading interventions. The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity has information geared to older individuals. The Dyslexia Help website from the University of Michigan is packed with user-friendly information for parents.

Provided by University of Florida

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