

How to Improve Reading Skills in Children with ADHD or Learning Disabilities

Guaranteed tips for improving reading comprehension in children with ADHD or learning disabilities like dyslexia.

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In first and second grade, most children learn to read. Beginning in third grade, they're expected to read to learn. They may be assigned to find facts on the Internet for a project on aquatic mammals, for instance, or asked to identify plot points in a work of fiction. The ability to extract meaning from written sources — to learn independently — becomes increasingly important with each new grade.

Reading comprehension depends on the ability to quickly sound out and recognize words, which can be hard for students with attention deficit disorder (ADD ADHD) or learning disabilities like dyslexia.

Even after the mechanics of reading have been mastered, many children with ADHD have trouble understanding the text, making connections within the story, and relating what they're reading to what they already know. Fortunately, reading comprehension skills and strategies can be learned. Children who are taught multiple strategies, and guided in their use, eventually choose some to use on their own.

Read to your child.

Even if your child can read on his own, there is value in reading aloud to him. A child's listening skills are usually stronger than his reading skills, so your child can comprehend more if he reads along silently as you read the book out loud.

Begin with short passages, and extend the time if your child maintains focus. Books on tape, with accompanying texts, provide another way to pair reading and listening.

Engage the imagination.

While your child reads or listens, encourage her to visualize the events in the story, creating a picture or movie in her mind. After a few pages, ask her to describe it.

Show how books are organized.

Textbooks are often structured in a way that highlights and summarizes important material. Show your child how paying attention to captions, charts, section headings, and sample study questions can organize his thinking and provide valuable facts.

When your child reads fiction, train him to look for the five W's: *Who* are the main characters, *where* and *when* does the story take place, *what* conflicts do the characters face, and *why* do they act as they do.

Although newspaper and magazine articles don't always contain a narrative, information about the five W's typically appears in the first paragraph or two.

Ask for predictions.

When reading a book with your child, stop occasionally to ask what she thinks might happen next. This requires her to integrate what she has learned so far about the characters and storyline—and about the way stories are typically organized—to anticipate the rest of the plot.

If she's reading a Harry Potter novel, for example, asks what she thinks will happen the next time Harry and Draco Malfoy face each other in a Quidditch match. Or get her opinion on what she thinks author J.K. Rowling will write about in the next book.

It doesn't matter if her hunches are correct: Asking for predictions encourages her to pay very close attention to what she reads. What's more, it helps you gauge just how much she's comprehending.

Show interest in what your child is reading.

Ask her to tell you about the book or chapter she just finished. What was the main idea? Who was her favorite character? Why did she like or dislike the book? Did it remind her of other stories she's read or of experiences she has had?

If it was a textbook chapter, what did she learn, and how does it apply to what she's learning in school? Having to verbalize what she has read requires her to make sense of it.

If your child is unable to provide a coherent summary, read the book yourself. Engage her in a discussion of *your* favorite parts and characters, and talk about how you connected parts of the story so that it all came together.

Encourage note-taking.

Have your child keep a notepad or index cards nearby to jot down important information as he reads. Note-taking pushes a reader to make sense of the material, and the cards become terrific tools when studying for a test later on.

If a book belongs to your child, permit her to mark relevant details with a pencil or highlighter. Do this together the first few times—it's an opportunity to demonstrate how to pick out important facts.

Does your child learn best visually? Help him create a chart with boxes for the story's setting, characters' names, and major themes and events. Or show her how to make a mind map—a diagram that uses key words, colors, and symbols to represent ideas and information.

Increase word power.

The stronger your child's vocabulary, the better his comprehension—and the less frequently he'll put down a book to ask about a word.

If you know that a passage contains unfamiliar words, define them—or have him look them up in a dictionary—before he begins to read.

Translate figures of speech.

A child with a language-based learning disorder can be overly literal: Reading that a character "took the bull by the horns" or "looked like he'd seen a ghost" can stop him cold.

Help your child understand that a phrase that seems out of context may be a figure of speech. Together, compile a list of expressions and what they mean.

Teach your child to read between the lines.

Point out sentences in which information is implied, and ask her to fill in what's missing. She should understand that the statement, "George was excited about winning top prize at his school's science fair for the second time," means that George has won the science award once before.

Build on background knowledge.

It's easier to understand subject matter that you know something about. Help your child select reading materials that reflect his interests, and encourage him to bring his own experiences to his understanding of a book.

Form a book group.

If your child has friends who enjoy similar books, get them together to discuss what they've read or to collaborate on a project, such as a mural or a skit about the story.

Once you've introduced your child to this array of reading comprehension strategies, have him write each of his favorites on a separate bookmark. He can use these in schoolbooks—choosing the strategy best-suited to each text—and have a handy reminder to hold his place.



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