

How to help a struggling reader

By Kathryn Tatnall, Youth Services Librarian

I love reading, I am sure that comes as no surprise. You'd be hard pressed to find a librarian who dislikes reading. I love curling up with a book on a chilly morning. I love falling asleep with a book at night. I love stolen moments of the day reading, when I should really be doing something else. I read on planes, trains, and in the car as long as I'm not driving. I read in restaurants, coffee shops, and in waiting rooms. I read fiction and non-fiction from the adult shelves and the children's room. I love young adult fiction and biographies about almost anyone.

I must confess though that I haven't always loved reading. It was a struggle for me when I was a child and learning how to read. The words didn't always make sense to me. I had a hard time sounding out words because I really didn't understand all the sounds the letters made and the sounds some of them produced by sitting side by side. There are times when I still struggle with this as an adult.

Helping a struggling reader at home is not the easiest task for a parent or grandparent. We want our kids to succeed and it breaks our hearts when they don't. There is nothing that I can suggest that will make it easier to watch them struggle, but I do have some suggestions on how to help them struggle a bit less.

- 1) Be patient to reduce your child's anxiety about reading. Your child may not seem anxious, but if you get tense and upset while he or she is reading it can create a stressful situation. If a session of reading isn't going well then stop. Be positive and let them know that you'll pick it up again tomorrow.
- 2) Set aside some time to read each day. Ten minutes a day without your phone, computer or television on will help you and your child focus on the book you're sharing. Let your child choose the book you will read together, even if they pick the same book over and over again. Research shows that this helps them become more fluent readers. Make sure to look over a new book cover to cover before reading. Look through all of the pages and pictures to see what might be coming in the book.
- 3) If the book is a bit hard for your child to read on their own then take turns reading it. If your child wants to read to you on their own choose an easier book to give them confidence and success.

- 4) Build your child's confidence by staying positive in the face of mistakes. Recognize their mistake but make it understood that anyone learning something new makes mistakes, it is how we learn.
- 5) When your child gets stuck on a word, give them a bit of time to sound it out. You can give them prompts for the sound they are looking for, however, it should be their choice whether you tell them the word or not. Some words in the English language are nearly impossible for a young reader to sound out because they are not pronounced as they are written. Allow them to try before you tell them the correct pronunciation and have them repeat what you have said to help them learn the correct pronunciation.
- 6) What I didn't know about my younger self was that I struggled with phonological awareness, or the ability to hear the separate sounds in a word, knowing when words rhyme, and blending separate sounds into words. Many children struggle with this aspect of reading. Play with sounds with your children. Ask them to rhyme with you while doing just about anything; driving in the car or out taking a walk.
- 7) Read to your child as long as they will let you. When my youngest was eight years old I started reading the Harry Potter series to her. My older children, two of whom were teenagers, sat in on those readings. Children learn skills by listening to someone else read, such as vocabulary and how we put words together in print.

If you would like information on how to choose an appropriate book for your reader, stop by the children's room to learn more about the library's collection and the Five Finger Rule.

The library is located at 17 N. Broadway and is open to the public Monday to Thursdays 9:30 a.m.-8 p.m. and Friday and Saturdays 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m.