

Struggling Readers

by Kathryn Tatnall

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 of almost anyone. Sometimes I have to read a book for work, and even so, I usually enjoy it.

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; I don't think I will ever be able remember how to pronounce the names, Owatonna or Faribault.

Helping a struggling reader at home is not the easiest of 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 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 watching you get tense and upset while he or she is reading will 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, but then share a book with your child.

- 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.
- 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 driving in the car or out on a walk.
- 7) Read to your child as long as they will let you. Children learn skills by listening to someone else read, such as vocabulary and how we put words together in print.

You can find more suggestion to help you struggling reader and enrich your child's education at www.oxfordowl.co.uk . If you would like more information on how to choose an appropriate book for your reader, stop by the children's area of the library to learn more about the Five Finger Rule.