

Supporting your child when reading at home

This leaflet has been produced by Merton's School Improvement Team to help parents support their children's reading at home. It includes links to information that may be helpful as well as advice about ways to approach reading with your child.

If you have any questions about your child's reading please speak to their teacher in the first instance. S/he knows your child and is best placed to advise you on how to help.

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1) Why is reading so important?

*“The more that you read, the more things you will know.
The more that you learn, the more places you'll go.”
Dr Seuss*

Reading is a life skill - one that we use every day, whether we realise it or not. Readers make better writers and spellers; readers have better communication skills. In fact, a child who enjoys reading is more likely to do well in their education overall, no matter what their social or economic background. However, it is not just about performing for tests. Research shows that children who read for enjoyment every day develop a broader vocabulary, have a better general knowledge and a better understanding of different peoples' views, cultures and perspectives. Dr Seuss is right!

2) Keep talking

If children are going to understand what they read, they need to have heard the words and to understand what they mean. There are two important ways that you can help with this at home – reading to them and talking to them.

Talking to your child exposes them to new words and allows them to practice using them. It doesn't have to be a sit down conversation: make lunch together, play together, build a Lego model, talk about what you can see as you walk in the park, walk round the shops or out of the car window. By talking about what you are doing, you are helping your child to learn new words. When they encounter these words in their reading later, they will already be familiar with them and know what they mean.

3) What is phonics and why do we teach it?

Phonics is a way of teaching children how to read and write. Written language is like a code where individual letters represent different sounds. When children are taught this code, they are able to 'decode' the written word – they are able to read. Phonics lessons in school involve children being taught the sounds of spoken English and matching these to the letters or groups of letters that represent them in writing.

Merton schools use an approach called synthetic phonics, the most widely used approach, which is also recommended by the Department for Education. In phonics lessons, children are taught how sounds (phonemes)

are associated with particular letters, or groups of letters (graphemes). When word reading they are taught to read each sound in isolation – this is called segmenting. They then blend the sounds together so that they can read the whole word. For example, in the early stages of instruction, children are taught to take a single-syllable word such as 'pat' apart into its three letters, pronounce a sound for each letter in turn (p, a, t) and blend them together to form the word.

As other letters are learned, children learn to build and read other words that use the same sounds in different combinations, e.g. sat, tap, taps, spat. Through a carefully structured programme, they are taught the most common sounds for each letter, moving onto combinations of letters that make one sound (digraphs and trigraphs). The next stages in learning are alternative spellings of the same sounds (e.g. bear, fair, dare) and different pronunciations of the same letter patterns (e.g. tough, though, through). This approach supports children in both reading and spelling. Knowing the individual sounds will allow them to write words for others to read.

There are some words that are not decode-able using the rules that children are taught in Reception, Year 1 and 2. These are words which do not follow the rules of the phonics code (e.g. the, his, today, any, people). Teachers call them 'exception' words and the most common ones are taught specifically as sight words in school – the spelling curriculum groups them according to year group. Some schools talk about them as red words or tricky words.

Talk to your child's teacher if you wish to find out more about your schools chosen phonics programme.

Key phonics terminology:

- **decoding** – decoding is a key skill for learning to read that involves recognising the letter-sound relationships, taking apart and reading the sounds in words before blending them together.
- **segmenting** – breaking down a word into individual sounds
- **blending** – reading the individual sounds together to form the word
- **phoneme** – a sound that can be represented by a letter or group of letters
- **grapheme** – a letter, or combination of letters, that represent a sound
- **digraph** – two letters that represent one sound e.g. sh, th, ee, oy
- **trigraph** – three letters that represent one sound e.g. igh

4) Developing a love of reading

Reading with your child at home is one of the most important things you can do to support your child's learning and can start from the very earliest age. The Booktrust have prepared guides to support parents when reading with their children. Their website has specific guides for reading with different age groups (0-12mths; 3-4 years & 4-6 years) which have been translated into over 20 different languages. They have also produced guidance on reading with deaf, blind or partially sighted children, as well as specific guidance for carers and foster families of children ages 3-7 years, to help make reading a part of everyday life. Below are some suggestions to get you going, from the very early days of parenthood.

www.booktrust.org.uk/books-and-reading/tips-and-advice/reading-tips

If your child is to come to love reading for themselves, it must be something that they connect with good feelings. Create a safe and relaxed environment whenever you are reading with together whether sitting on the sofa before tea, snuggling up with a book before bed or under a tree in the park. As you read with your child, they will be hearing new words and phrases, building their vocabulary as well as coming to understand how stories work and the patterns they follow.

The right time, place and activity

- Decide beforehand if it is a reading practice session – a homework activity – or a reading for fun activity, a shared family time. Both of these are important, but reading for skills practice might be better done before tea or in the morning, rather than when your child is tired and getting ready for sleep. Timing is crucial to the success of your reading together. See point 5. for further ideas to support the development of your child's reading skills.
- Find somewhere where you will not be disturbed and where our time with your child will be your priority – turn off phones and televisions, and put the baby to bed!
- Choose a book that your child will be interested in - it may sound obvious but motivation is key. There is a wonderful range of children's literature available to you. Take your child's lead.

Talk about the story

Reading is more than just phonics and when sharing stories, poems or information books together, it is important to talk about what the writing says. Read aloud to your child, talking about the words and pictures, and sharing

ideas about the book. Start a conversation about the story – don't forget to give your views too...

- Let's look at some of the pictures. What do you think this story is going to be about? I think...
- What do you think is going to happen next?
- What is your favourite part of the story? Who is your favourite character? I like the bit when...
- Does this story remind you of anything? I think this character is a bit like... because...

Show them

Children who see adults reading, and enjoying it, are much more likely to want to read themselves. Talk to your child about what you are reading – on paper or on screen. Tell them why you are enjoying it, why it is interesting, what you are learning from it. Talk to them about how you use reading in your everyday life – at work and at home (labels and lists, instructions and recipes, TV and cinema listings) – and encourage them to help you with it.

5) Supporting your child's learning

Home school links

All schools will have a home-school reading program which aims to support your child in further practicing their reading at home. You may be asked to make notes about what your child has read or how they are getting on with reading outside of school.

Most schools will hold introductory meetings for new parents to explain how they teach phonics and what to expect as your child learns to read. These meetings are very worthwhile. If you have any questions or concerns about how to help your child, talk to their teacher.

Practicing the phonics

If your child is reading a decodable book from school, there are likely to be some notes inside the front cover with suggestions for how to provide support. Read these before you start. They may refer to some common exception words that you need to remind your child of before you start; they will also indicate what the key sounds are that are used in the book. Revising these together before you start reading will give your child confidence when they see that word during the story. These will be the sounds that your child has been working on in school.

Be patient!

Children need time to combine their phonics skills of segmenting and blending when reading. It is more challenging to read words within a book than it is to read individual words during exercises in class. It will take time and they will need support in sounding out the phonemes and blending them together to make words. Guide them through the process for more challenging words and give them thinking time.



Don't forget to praise them – learning to read is hard!

6) Where else can I find support?

The Hungry Little Minds campaign

www.hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk

The Hungry Little Minds campaign was launched by the HM Government in July 2019 as a way to aid parents in supporting their child's learning at home. Activities are broken down by age, with video tips, advice and suggested games to help with early learning, for all preschool children, from newborn to five years old.

The Bookstart programme

Merton supports the National Bookstart programme which encourages all parents and carers to develop a love of books, stories and rhymes with their children from as early an age as possible. One of the ways it does this is by giving free books to every child in England and Wales at two key stages before school (a 'Baby Pack' before their first birthday and a 'Treasure Pack' when they are of nursery age), as well as providing specific guidance for parents of children with additional needs. This includes tips and guidance on reading together.

Visit the Bookstart website to find out how to get your free books, for a range of interactive books to share online as well as suggested activities to support you in sharing stories with your children.

<https://www.booktrust.org.uk/what-we-do/programmes-and-campaigns/bookstart/>

Your local library

Merton has seven libraries available for residents to use, offering a range of services for children and young people. Staff will be on hand to support you in finding what you are looking for. Many hold special events and activities for children, as well as having dedicated library areas for children and collections of stories in a range of other languages – check out the Merton libraries website for links to each facility:

(https://libraries.merton.gov.uk/client/en_GB/merton/).

Merton's Libraries

- Colliers Wood Library
105-109 High Street Colliers Wood, Colliers Wood, London SW19 2HR
- Mitcham Library
157 London Road, Mitcham CR4 2YR
- Morden Library
Merton Civic Centre, London Road, Morden SM4 5DX
- Pollards Hill Library
South Lodge Avenue, Mitcham CR4 1LT
- Raynes Park Library
Approach Road, Raynes Park, London SW20 8BA
- West Barnes Library
Station Road, New Malden KT3 6JF
- Wimbledon Library
35 Wimbledon Hill Road, Wimbledon SW19 7NB