



Helping My Child

Unofficial homework - sharing what they have learned today

Encourage your child to tell you what they have done at school today. The earlier you can get into this habit the better. Children in Nursery, Reception and Year 1 will have been learning songs and actions that they can show you and you can join in with. If your child absolutely won't tell you, have a chat to the teacher and see if there are actions or songs that they can share with you. Otherwise, try learning some songs and nursery rhymes at home together. Have a look at the interactive Hickory Dickory Dock game together or try some of the books below. Sharing songs and rhymes is something that you can easily do when you are busy with something else e.g. cooking, cleaning, driving in the car.

If you find out from the school which letters your child has learned so far, you could print out picture cards from this site. Ideally print them onto card and cut them up. See if your child can match up the pictures to the words and then use them to play matching games such as snap, pairs etc.

If your child plays any of the games from this site at school, they may wish to play them at home too. If they are willing, share this with them and encourage them to tell you how they are working things out. See the teaching ideas sheets to get some clues about the types of questions you could ask.

Reading with your child

One of the greatest gifts that you can give to your child is a love of reading. Research has shown that one of the biggest indicators of success in a child's life is whether or not they have books in the home. As a parent, try to focus on making reading fun and enjoyable rather than getting bogged down in trying to teach nitty gritty skills. There are many, many different things that you can do. Here are just a few:

Let your child see you reading - This can be a newspaper, magazine, anything you like. This is a powerful message to send to your child so go on, put your feet up for 10 minutes and have a read.

Read something with your child - It doesn't need to be a book. The secret is to find something that your child is desperate to read - comics, magazines, football programmes, newspapers, internet pages, texts, e-mails, catalogues etc. If you are reading books together you could ask your child's school what Book Band your child is reading at (this will be a colour) and choose a book from this band. However, never underestimate that power of a book that a child really, really wants to read, even if it is too hard for them. If they are very keen to read a particular tricky book then go for it and just help them out when they need it.

Talk about what they are reading - Talk before you start. Talk whilst you are reading. Talk after you have finished. You can still talk about what your child is reading even if they don't want to actually read with you any more.

Praise your child - Studies show that children who are given specific support with their reading make much greater progress if they are given lots of praise than if they are given the support alone. It can be tough to think up lots of new ways to praise your child. It can be also be hard to stay positive if you are particularly worried about your child's reading skills. Try to praise your child's accuracy, understanding and attitude. If you are stuck for ideas have a look at these [Ways to Praise](#).

Questions to ask the school

If you wish to know more about how your child's reading is progressing and how you could help, here are some questions that you could ask your child's class teacher to find out a bit more information. Do bear in mind that class teachers are usually rushed off their feet and have a lot of children to take care of. They may not have all this information at their fingertips. You may need to give them a chance to get back to you. Also, no matter how concerned you are about your child, they will always do best if you and the class teacher are working as a team so try to keep discussions as positive as you can.

How do you teach phonics in this school?

Are you using Letters and Sounds or another phonics programme - if so, which one?

What phonic phase is my child working at?

Is this above, below or the same as the phase that the whole class are being taught at?

What book band are they reading at?

Is this above, below or the same as the average child in the class?

What would you suggest that I do to help my child at home?

Concerned about your child's progress?

The initial step should be to go and talk to your child's class teacher. They won't feel like you are bothering them. Teachers are generally very pleased to have parents who are interested and keen to help out at home. Ask them the questions above but also ask them:

Are you concerned about my child's progress with phonics and reading?

Is my child receiving any additional support with their phonics and or reading?

If the teacher is concerned or if you are still concerned, your next step should be to talk to the SENCO (Special Needs Co-ordinator). The class teacher or school office should be able to tell you who this is. Most teachers will be very pleased that you are doing this and may well suggest that this is your next step. Teachers often have to fight very hard to get support for the children in their class and parental support can be very effective.

Explain your concerns to the SENCO and ask if there is anything that they can suggest. They may well suggest just keeping an eye on your child or monitoring them as the first step. Don't worry, they aren't trying to fob you off. Before they can set any balls in motion they need to have collected some evidence about how your child is doing. Arrange with them to meet again when they have found out some more. Then, they may be able to suggest some tests that could be carried out or arrange for your child to have some additional support. If the SENCO and the class teacher both feel that your child does not need support then try to accept their reassurances - it is not in their interest to say that your child doesn't need support when they do. If however, you are still not happy, keep talking to both the class teacher and SENCO and keep raising your concerns (calmly and politely - remember you and your child need to keep working with these people).

In addition, ensure that you are using as many of the ideas as possible above and are reading every single day with your child, in one way or another.

You may feel that you wish to arrange for additional tutoring outside school for your child. This can be a very expensive option. Take great care to ensure that any tutor you choose is fully trained up in how to teach phonics and/or has specialist skills in supporting children who are having difficulties with learning to read. It may be quite hard to find tutors with these skills.