

The Reading Corner 4th Issue

Written by Patricia J. Lear, M.Ed. Learning Specialist/Diagnostician

What can I do when my child doesn't finish reading and homework assignments?

Welcome to *The Reading Corner*. In previous issues we have been discussing what to do if your child has difficulty reading and how to form a team with your child's teacher and school. We have also discussed what the term dyslexia means (difficulty with reading), the skills your child should know in first grade and commonly used terms you need to know as the advocate for your child. Several parents ask this month what can they do to help their child until their reading improves. This is a great question and I'm so glad there is such a strong interest in how to accommodate children who have difficulty in reading, by both parents and teachers.

There is a great need to make accommodations for the child who is having difficulty to reduce the daily stress that is being experienced, improve self esteem, and the anxiety of having to even begin a reading assignment in, or, out of school. The most frequent problem for the child, teacher and parent often occurs when an assignment is not even started, yet alone completed. Which brings me to mention the first skill of the day, and it is for the parent and not the child. Too often we hear the parent saying that it took Michael an hour before he even started his homework, because he did every other activity he could to avoid beginning the work.

We have all been in this position at one time having avoided tasks we felt would be unpleasant, or, too hard or difficult to finish. Children are not much different with one exception, we are the adults and we understand how to find ways to complete a task we do not want to do, knowing it is our responsibility. It is not always easy but we are equipped to find ways to get things done.

In order to address Michael's refusal to begin his homework we need to assure him that we are with him and supporting him in beginning this difficult task of reading and working through his assignment. With the knowledge of knowing he will have

support the more likely Michael will be to begin his work. Michael is not procrastinating or refusing to do his work because he doesn't want to please you he just doesn't know how to get his work done. He doesn't have the tools. It would be like my telling you that you have to build a house to be successful, but, I fail to give you the tools to do the job. I keep coming to visit you and seeing that the house isn't started and you are too embarrassed to tell me you don't know how to start to build a house, so you keep putting the task off. Children need the right tools to complete assignments and when they cannot read at their grade level you can assume they do not have the right tools to get the job done. So, let's look at some ways we can make the job easier for children until they have the tools to get their responsibilities accomplished.

There are hundreds of ways you can help your child when they have trouble with their reading assignments. Not all interventions or accommodations fit all children. You have to take into consideration how severe their problem may be, the age of the child and many other variables. The interventions I am listing are to give you ideas about how you may begin supporting your child during these difficult times and making the task of homework less difficult for you both.

1. The most important intervention is just being with your child and giving kind words of encouragement throughout the homework experience.
2. Read the directions to your child so they will be working on an assignment correctly from the beginning. Often directions are written in smaller print. Smaller print makes reading unknown words even more frustrating.
3. Always have your child repeat the directions back to you to confirm they have a thorough understanding of what they are expected to do.
4. Set a timer for when the child can take a break if they have accomplished what you have asked them to complete.
5. Give frequent breaks.
6. To promote success, ask yourself if the material your child is working with and the specific homework is based on the child's reading level.
7. Children who are reading below grade level should have had their homework modified for them before it comes home. How does a child do reading homework at a third grade level if they are barely reading at the second grade level?

8. Take turns reading to help move the reading assignment along and reduce the child's struggle. Be the good reading model and have the child follow along, listening to how you read. Read slowly so you don't encourage the child to rush.
9. Review any vocabulary they might not know. Don't assume the child does understand everything. Often if a child does not read on grade level they also do not understand all the vocabulary used in their grade level.
10. Describe and discuss vocabulary and the content of the reading in picture form. Children with reading difficulties often have difficulty visualizing language and parents can help by describing in pictures and leading questions with, "What does this sentence make you see?"
11. Reduce the amount of material your child must read at one time. Look over the assignments that need to be completed and figure out ways to break them up to reduce your child's frustration. Breaking assignments up will increase the likelihood of their completing assignments in the long term.
12. Number 3 X 5 cards to indicate what they should do first, second and so forth. Use words and pictures to indicate what assignments should be completed and in what order.
13. Give your child frequent breaks for working so hard with the understanding that breaks are only for a few minutes. The more the child trusts they receive a break the more likely they are to start their homework.
14. Make up a chart of rewards your child can earn for beginning and completing their homework, with and without your help. Few of us would work all our lives, or as hard, without a pay check or some type of reward.
15. Always reinforce how proud you are of your child when you go into help or check on their progress.
16. Make sure there is more than enough time to complete an assignment and make certain the child knows when they can stop working to encourage good work habits. Children who don't know when to anticipate the end of

an assignment spend more time frustrated, and worrying about when they can stop or how much time is left to complete the assignment.

17. Communicate with the teacher frequently about how long it is taking your child to complete assignments. Your child should not be struggling with home work. Homework should be an opportunity to improve what they have been taught during the school hours and reinforce their memory of the information or skills taught during the day. If you find you are teaching your child every night, and being the teacher all over again, it is an indication that there may be a larger problem than the child not being able to read. It may also indicate that because your child is not reading on grade level they are becoming further behind. Children should be demonstrating progress every day. If the child is getting behind, changes in school need to be discussed.

These are only a few of the techniques you can use to help make reading a little easier to look forward to when doing homework. Just knowing that Mom and Dad want to be there to support Michael or Jamie makes the child feel valuable in the home, when their self worth may be in question at school. Later in the year we will revisit techniques you can use for studying other subjects that require a lot of reading.

With summer coming you may want to ask your school for next year's books. This way you and your child can make up vocabulary cards to become familiar with what is to come. Being familiar with vocabulary goes a long way to improve the child's opportunity to learn in the next year. In this way the new year is less scary and the preparation may make the coming subjects easier. Make sure you enroll your child in a reading program at school or with a learning specialist. Reading does not just improve over time. Reading remediation takes a lot of work on the part of the student and all the adults they are depending on, to help them with their problems.

If you have additional questions about the content of this month's *The Reading Corner* please contact me at leareducationalcenter@juno.com or call me at the Lear Educational Center at 610-252-0965. We will make every attempt to answer all questions submitted. Look for more information about reading and related subjects in the next issue of *The Reading Corner* or visit on line for information and links about reading issues at <http://leareducationalcenter.com> . Thank you so much for your interest in your child's reading development. Reading is the primary means to learning and education. Let's all help to see all children reach

their full potential while supporting learning and education through the advancement in reading.