

Struggling readers

Lots of parents worry about their child's reading. When you hear the playground chat about how well another child is doing with their reading, it's easy to feel that your child might be getting left behind.

However, it's important to remember that reading isn't a race. Being a good reader might be the finishing line, but children get there in many different ways and at different speeds.

Read (or [watch](#)) Jean Gross CBE give her expert advice on how to support children who struggle with reading.

When should I worry about my child's reading?

Children learn to read in different ways and at different speeds. Many very clever children come late to reading or may struggle with it for a long time. It is not cause for concern if your four- or five-year-old is not yet reading, but you can give them a boost at home where necessary, through [activities that focus on fun](#). Talk to your child's teacher about what your child is doing at school and how you can support this at home.

If your child is not reading by the time they are six, you might want to ask advice from their teacher. But it is important to know that there is every chance your child will catch up soon.

Is my child a struggling or a reluctant reader?

There are two main types of worry that parents have about their child's reading. You may have noticed that your child doesn't seem interested in picking up a book. When they do try, they seem to be able to read the words quite well – it's just that they don't want to.

We call this group of children reluctant readers, and often they are boys.

The trick is to switch them on to reading by using their interests: magazines about computer games, books about dinosaurs, instructions on how to build a model, comics and adventure stories – whatever works.

- [Common reading issues: Encouraging boys to read](#)
- [Common reading issues: Reluctant readers](#)
- [Blog: Great books to get boys reading](#)

The second type of worry parents have is when their child just can't seem to remember the sounds of letters or remember common words – like the word 'the' or 'come' – from one day to the next. Reading is a slow and painful struggle, distressing for your child and distressing for you to watch. We can call these children struggling readers.

Our free eBook library has lots of books perfect for struggling readers.

Why might my child be struggling?

Children struggle with reading for all sorts of reasons. They may find it hard to sit still and concentrate; they may have got so anxious about reading that

it stops them learning; they may have speech and language difficulties or a history of hearing loss. They may be in the early stages of learning English, because they speak a different language at home. There may be a history of reading or spelling difficulties in the family; research does show that literacy difficulties can be hereditary, when linked to dyslexia. If you are worried about dyslexia, do talk to your child's teacher. There are good websites you can look at, such as the [British Dyslexia Association's website](#).

- [Blog: How to pick books for struggling readers](#)
- [Blog: Picture books for older readers](#)
- [Blog: Building reading dens](#)

A shared feature of many struggling readers is that they find it hard to process the sounds in spoken words. For example, they might not pick up that a spoken word like 'coat' is made up of three separate sounds (*c-oa-t*), or that it rhymes with 'boat'. This makes it hard for them to learn the links between sounds and letters.

Bear in mind your child's birth date. If they have an August birthday, they will be almost a year younger than the oldest children in their class – so you'd expect them to be a little behind the average. They may need a bit more time to mature before they start to fly with reading and writing.

What should I do if I am worried?

The best thing to do if you are worried about your child is to talk to your child's class teacher. They can set your mind at rest if they think your child is making good progress, or they can talk you through plans to help if they think your child needs more support. Do tell the teacher if there is any history of reading or spelling problems in the family, as this will help them make a decision about whether or not your child may need extra help. If you're still not sure, the best thing to do is agree a timeframe with the teacher – a period after which you'll meet up again to see how your child is getting on.

What extra help might my child receive?

Schools have a range of ways to help struggling readers catch up. There might be a period of extra phonics teaching or extra reading practice 1:1 or in a small group with a teacher or teaching assistant. Lots of research has shown that children can catch up and keep up when they get the right help. Parents sometimes worry about their child feeling singled out if they go out of class for extra help. Please don't be concerned. It's very common for children to have extra help at some time or another, and not just for reading. So children just tend to see it as a normal part of the school day, and they really love the extra attention.