

Reading Comprehension

Parent Handout



What is Reading Comprehension?

Reading comprehension is the ability to understand what is being read. Children must be able to read the words in the text and combine it with what they already know to “think” about what the author is trying to say. Reading comprehension is NOT just finding answers in the text. Children must be able to interact with the text, think deeper, analyse, predict and be able to summarise what is written.

How can I help my child with reading comprehension?

- Before reading, look through the book and find words that your child may not know the meaning of. Talk about the words with your child– discuss the meaning of the word and give examples. For example, “I was looking through the book and found this word, ‘ecstatic’. Ecstatic means very, very happy and excited. I was ecstatic on the day you were born. Can you think of a time when you were ecstatic?”
- Before reading a story with your child, look at the cover. Read the title and look at the picture if there is one. Talk about what you already know about the topic and try to make a connection with what your child already knows. For example, before reading a book on “Desert Animals”, you can talk about what your child already knows about the desert and animals that live in different areas. Activating this “prior knowledge” helps with reading comprehension.
- While reading, help your child make connections with the text. When you ask your child questions such as “how would you feel if that happened to you?” or “does this part of the story remind you of our vacation on the beach?” you are having your child make a “text-to-self” connection.
- Encourage your child to make predictions while reading. (“What do you think will happen next?” “Let’s keep reading and see”).
- Model thoughtful question asking while reading. Stay away from yes/no questions. Questions such as “Why do you think the boy was afraid?” is preferable to “Was the boy afraid?”
- Model what good readers do when they don’t understand what they are reading. “Think-aloud” or verbalise what you are doing. For example, “I’m not quite sure I know what this means, I’m going to go back and re-read this part.”
- During and after reading, have your child retell or summarise the text.
- Encourage your child to “make a movie in his/her head” while reading. This strategy is known as mental imagery and helps with reading comprehension. If reading a chapter book with limited pictures on the pages, stop periodically in the story and share with your child how you are picturing the scene and ask him/her to share with you.
- Read aloud to your child and read with your child every day!