



Help your children to learn

A GUIDE TO SUPPORTING READING FOR  
PARENTS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

department for  
**education and skills**

Resources for  
parents by parents

Research shows that your interest and involvement in your child's learning and education is more important than anything else in helping your child fulfil their potential. As parents, you are the people who go with your child on their learning journey, from the day they are born to the time they become an adult.

You, as the parent, carer or guardian know your child best. These leaflets give ideas and suggestions for you to choose from – you will know which ones suit you, your child and the school. All of the ideas in the leaflet have been developed by parents and can be used with, or adapted for, both primary and secondary age children and young people.

There are many sorts of schools in England – the ideas and suggestions made in these leaflets do not necessarily reflect DfES policy or school policy and should be viewed simply as support for parents in helping their children to learn. Your school may not have seen this leaflet before and it may be helpful to tell them that you are going to use it. All schools have a home school agreement and by signing this agreement you will be acknowledging your partnership with the school to help educate your child. Working in partnership with the school will help your child become a successful learner and a rounded person.



## How to use this guide

This guide has been written to help you help your child with reading. To make it easy for you to find the information you need, each section of the guide has been divided into two colour-coded parts.

**Part 1** (blue) is called 'Instant ideas'. These are quick activities that you can do together with your child, daily or a few times a week, and which will make a real difference to your child's reading.

**Part 2** (green) is called 'Try making time to' and gives you suggestions for longer activities that you could do together to build on the good work you are already doing.



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## Frequently asked questions

What do I need to know about reading at Key Stages 3 and 4?

I am really busy and don't have time to read with my child.  
What can I do?

My son doesn't like reading. What can I do?

My child has problems with reading. How do I help?

I have/my partner has problems with reading.  
Can I still help my child?

My child is not getting enough support at school to help them  
with reading. What should I do?

I am worried that my child is not being challenged enough to  
improve their reading at school. What can I do?

My child keeps reading the same books over and over again.  
Is this normal?

My child will only read magazines, not books.

I think my child is dyslexic. What should I do?

What sort of books should I choose for my child?

**You will find the answers to these questions at the end of  
the booklet.**

## Why do I need to help my child with reading?

The move from primary to secondary school is an exciting time for parents and children. Your child is growing up and becoming more independent. However, you may be worrying about the extra demands of secondary school and wondering what you can do to help. Many parents feel like this, and it is very natural. This leaflet offers you ideas from other parents that you can choose from, to help your child as they move into and through secondary school.

One of the best ways you can help your child do well at school is by helping them to enjoy reading for pleasure – whether they like magazines, newspapers, novels or comics. Research shows that children who enjoy reading do better at school, and that parents play a key role in helping to develop this love of reading.

### **Research findings: reading means achieving**

Recent research into the reading skills of 15 year olds across the world found that children who are more interested in reading do better at school than those who don't read for pleasure. The study also found that parents who talk to their children about books, TV programmes and films help to keep their children interested in reading.

Having books, newspapers and magazines around at home also made a difference to how interested children were in reading.

## Instant ideas for helping your child to love reading – suggestions from parents

- Let your child choose what to read, rather than choosing what you think they should read.
- Encourage your child to read magazines, comics, newspapers and the internet as well as books.
- Talk to your child about books or magazines you haven't enjoyed, as well as things you love.
- Make time to read together if you can.
- Buy books as presents. Don't forget TV tie-ins and books about interests such as computer games or bands.
- Remember that your child is reading when they are looking at bus timetables, menus, instructions, TV guides, Teletext and the internet.

"I got my son to teach me how to use the computer. I was hopeless, but he knew exactly what to do. It has helped both of us, because I can do much more now and he lets me take more of an interest in what he does at school."

Dad, Scunthorpe

## Preparing for reading at secondary school

Your child may be looking forward to the challenges of a new, 'big' school, or may feel worried about the work. You can help support your child's reading by making them the 'expert' and getting them to tell about all the things they already know and can do.

### **Instant ideas:**

- Help your child to find books they will enjoy by joining the public library, if you are not already members. It is free to join and many libraries have CDs and DVDs that can be borrowed very cheaply, as well as many different types of books that can be borrowed for free.
- Read together. Try picking reading material about interests or hobbies you share, like your football team or a place you have visited together. 10 minutes a few times a week will make a difference.
- Talk to your child about the types of reading they think they will be asked to do in secondary school; get them to explain to you what they already know about types of non-fiction (factual writing), and try to match them to the subjects your child does at school.



- Chat about which books or magazines your child might read, to learn more about the subjects they will be doing at secondary school.
- Buy a book, book token or a magazine as a present or reward.

### Try making time to:

- Borrow picture books from the library in French, Spanish or German, depending on which language they will be learning, or ask a librarian or bookseller about the *Horrible Histories* or *Murderous Maths* series and other funny books about school topics.
- Go online to have a look at sites that might be useful for different subjects. All libraries have free internet access which can be booked. For information about safe websites for children, visit the Parents Information Network at [www.pin.org.uk](http://www.pin.org.uk) or Parents Online at [www.parentsonline.gov.uk](http://www.parentsonline.gov.uk)
- Go along to an event at the library together. Most libraries run the Summer Reading Challenge, a fun scheme that encourages children to read by giving them rewards like stickers, bookmarks and medals. You could encourage your child to take part.
- Find some books about moving schools. A librarian, bookseller or teacher can suggest titles. You could encourage your child to keep a scrap book or diary about moving to secondary school.

“Our local library has free internet access and now I book the kids in and take them down there some Saturdays. It’s great as they look forward to it and it gives me a chance to do the shopping in peace.”

Dad, Truro

“It’s easy to forget how much reading you do every day. I make sure my kids realise it is a part of my life by getting them involved when I can – like cooking using a recipe, making a shopping list or looking at the paper to see where we are in the league!”

Mum, Liverpool



## Supporting reading at Key Stage 3

Your child will be studying more subjects at secondary school, and will be working with many different types of reading materials, from newspaper articles and adverts to scientific explanations and instructions. Parents who support their children's education make a real difference to how well their child does, and there are lots of quick things you can do to help.

### **Instant ideas:**

- Try some skimming and scanning together. Skimming is when you read through a piece of text quickly to find out what the main idea is; scanning is glancing through a piece of text to find a specific piece of information. You can do this with a newspaper – perhaps ask your child to find something out for you. Why not ask them to scan a newspaper for news about a favourite footballer or to find out the weekend weather, or get them to skim read a recipe to tell you the basic steps?
- Help your child to work out what an unfamiliar word means by getting them to read the rest of the sentence and look for clues.
- Help by testing your child when they have spellings to learn, and by encouraging them to look up words they don't know in a dictionary.

### Try making time to:

- Build up the number of words your child knows – their vocabulary. As they go through secondary school, your child will need to know specialist words and recognise them when they are reading. To help them learn these words, you could ask your child to explain to you what they mean.
- Read books or plays that your child needs to study for school – in Year 9 English your child will study two scenes from a Shakespeare play. It can really help them if you read these together, and talk about the language and characters. Why not learn a few short quotations together as a competition?
- Borrow the video of the Shakespeare play from your local library or video rental shop and watch the scenes together.

### **Parent power: Parents make the difference, say experts**

A recent study has found that children who were reading to their parents improved their reading skills a great deal, even if the parents could not read English or read at all in any language.

## Supporting GCSE level reading across a range of subjects

During GCSE and GNVQ courses students have to do coursework which counts towards their final grade, as well as reading many different things to help them pass the course. You will find that your child has much more homework and you can make a difference by helping your child to manage their time. Reading for pleasure can get squeezed out as the amount of homework grows and parents can help by encouraging rest, relaxation and reading as well as school work!

### **Instant ideas:**

- Cut out newspaper articles about topics your child is studying.
- Read together if your child is having problems with reading in a particular subject.
- Encourage your child to go to a study support group. Many schools and libraries run free after-school groups – find out if there is one near you and suggest to your child they go along. They could meet new people, and will get help with their homework as well.
- Text message a good read to your child's mobile phone, if they have one, or send them an email with some recommendations from friends' children or from a newspaper.

### Try making time to:

- Speak to your child's subject teacher to see if there is anything that they could read that would help their studies or that would help them enjoy a topic.
- Talk about everyday topics, encouraging your child to be the 'expert' and use the technical terms they are learning at GCSE. For example, your child could tell you about tomorrow's weather using words such as precipitation, humidity and isobars, or they could explain how a circuit works when you switch on the light.
- Look up technical words you or your child don't recognise from their work in a dictionary or on the internet and make it your word of the day. When you have a list of new words you could test your child on them.
- Talk to your child about reading. Often GCSE students feel they have little time for reading for pleasure. You can help by talking about what they enjoy reading and helping to make time for it.

## Supporting GCSE level reading in English and English Literature

In GCSE English and English Literature students need to read at least two plays (one by Shakespeare), some poems, one or two novels and sometimes short stories as well. Your child's English teacher will be working with the class to study all these texts, but as a parent you can help your child by making sure they have access to many different types of text at home.

### **Instant ideas:**

- Borrow audio recordings of the texts your child is reading for their exams from the library and listen to them together, or share them as a family, perhaps while doing the washing up?
- Visit your local library or video store to borrow the film version of a GCSE text. Many have been made into films.
- Encourage your child to read more by helping them to find books, magazines, websites and comics that interest them or tie into the work they have been doing for GCSEs. Wider reading is part of GCSE English Literature.

### Try making time to:

- Talk about the adverts and think about what messages they are trying to get across when you are watching TV or reading a newspaper. Why not ask the 'expert' (your child) – to 'read' the advert; encourage them to use the technical terms to talk about the language and style of the advert?
- Use the internet to help your child. Websites often give reading tips for GCSE texts as well as explaining the key ideas and characters. Use the search engine [www.google.co.uk](http://www.google.co.uk) to help you find suitable sites.

**Don't forget reading for pleasure** – it is good to read for fun. Reading a magazine, comic or book is a good way to take a break.

"I was really worried about my son as he used to tell me that he hated reading. One way I could get him to read was by buying car magazines as a treat. I found out you could borrow magazines for free from the library so now he goes down there as well."

Mum, Manchester



## Can read, won't read. Help! What can I do?

Lots of children and teenagers don't read – here are some hints and tips from parents with reluctant readers:

- Talk to your child to find out what they do and don't like reading.
- Go to the library together and encourage your child to borrow something that interests them. Many libraries lend magazines as well as books for free. Don't forget graphic novels (novels that are like comics), cartoons and comics.
- Don't force your child to read something they are not interested in, even if you are worried about their reading.
- Set your homepage to a website your child might enjoy, if you have internet access. For example, you could try a skateboarding site or the homepage of a favourite TV programme. It is a good idea to check sites first to see that you are happy for your child to visit them.
- Encourage your child to read by finding reading material about their interests. Any reading that your child does is a good thing.

# What if? Worries and anxieties

## What do I need to know about reading at Key Stages 3 and 4?

In English, students are expected to read many different kinds of text, including plays, poems, and non-fiction (for example, diaries, travel writing, and science writing). As well as this, other subjects provide the chance for students to read for pleasure and study. To find out more about the curriculum, why not order a copy of *Learning Journey: A parent's guide to the secondary school curriculum*? You can get it free by calling 0845 60 222 60, pressing option three and quoting code 0124/2000. You can also download it from the publications section of [www.parentcentre.gov.uk](http://www.parentcentre.gov.uk)

## I am really busy and don't have time to read with my child. What can I do?

10 minutes a day or even a few times a week will make a real difference to your child's reading. Why not have a look at the 'instant ideas' at the beginning of each section for quick things you can do to help.

## **My son doesn't like reading. What can I do?**

Try to find things for him to read that are about his interests and let him choose what he wants to read as much as you can. Magazines, comics and non-fiction (fact) books might be more interesting to him than stories. Other reading activities, like tuning the video using the instructions can also develop reading. Don't forget that using the internet requires reading skills too and there is free access at your local library. If he is interested in computer games, there are lots of books on how to play the games and 'cheats' (short cuts). Praise your son for any reading he does and make sure he sees you reading too. Keep any reading you do together short and fun. Even though it is worrying, pushing your son too hard or making reading a chore will put him off even more.

## **My child has problems with reading. How do I help?**

If you are worried that your child is struggling with reading, it is best to make an appointment to see your child's form tutor. You can do this by calling the school and asking to speak to them by name or if you don't know this, give the name of your child and ask to be put through to their form tutor. It is best to call either before or after the school day – be prepared to leave a message. When you do speak to the form tutor, outline your worries (it may be helpful to write some notes to remind you before making the call) and ask to make an appointment to see them to discuss what can be done for your child.

## **I have/my partner has problems with reading. Can I still help my child?**

Research has shown that talking to children about what they are reading, and having books and magazines at home make a difference to children's progress *even* if parents have problems with reading themselves. If you want help with reading or have a friend you think needs help, call 0800 100 900 for information on local classes and support.

## **My child is not getting enough support at school to help them with reading. What should I do?**

If you think your child needs more support, ring your child's school and ask to speak to their English teacher. You can talk about your worries over the phone, or set up a meeting to discuss it further. It is best to call either before or after the school day – be prepared to leave a message. For advice on managing formal meetings with teachers, call 0845 60 222 60 and ask for leaflet HYCL/2 (a leaflet from the DfES).

## **I am worried that my child is not being challenged enough to improve their reading at school. What can I do?**

It is important for teachers and parents to have high but realistic expectations. Make sure that your child is not being put off reading by finding the books they are reading too easy or

uninteresting. Don't force your child to read a book you think they should read. It is much better to talk to them about what they like reading and help them to choose books they will enjoy. Booksellers, librarians and teachers can help with book choices. If you are still worried, speak to your child's English teacher. You can talk about your concerns over the phone, or set up a meeting to discuss it further. It is best to call either before or after the school day – be prepared to leave a message. For advice on managing formal meetings with teachers, call 0845 60 222 60 and ask for leaflet HYCL/2 (a leaflet from the DfES).

### **My child keeps reading the same books over and over again. Is this normal?**

Children often re-read books they have enjoyed or will stick to a particular genre (for example, horror) or series. Reading the same



books or same type of books over and over helps them to build reading confidence, and children will usually move on at their own pace. Don't stop them reading books again – interfering with what children choose to read can often put them off. If you are worried, you could make some suggestions for other books they might enjoy based on what they are already reading. For example, a child who enjoys *Goosebumps* might enjoy the *Series of Unfortunate Events* books. Ask your child's teacher, a librarian or a bookseller for advice on suitable titles.

### **My child will only read magazines, not books.**

Don't worry. Evidence shows that children who enjoy reading for pleasure perform better at school, whether they are reading magazines, newspapers or fiction. You could always try suggesting books that they might enjoy based on the magazines they read or their interests. Look at websites for advice (see [Help](#) below) or ask a librarian or teacher for suggestions.

### **I think my child is dyslexic. What should I do?**

You will need to make an appointment to speak to the school Special Needs Coordinator (SENCO). Ring the school and ask to speak to the SENCO. It may be useful to write some notes about your worries before you make the call so that you don't forget any points. Arrange a meeting so that you can discuss your child's needs, and get them tested for dyslexia. You can find out more

about dyslexia from the British Dyslexia Association (details in [Help](#) below) by visiting their website or calling the helpline number. They can advise about the best ways to support your child.

### **What sort of books should I choose for my child?**

Ideally, you should let your child choose books for themselves, as they are much more likely to want to read if they have been able to choose for themselves. If you want ideas for books, visit a website such as [www.cool-reads.co.uk](http://www.cool-reads.co.uk) which has reviews of books for 10-15 year olds, by 10-15 year olds, or ask your child's teacher, a librarian or a bookseller.



## Help – useful organisations and websites

Below is a list of organisations and websites where you can get more information about reading with your child.

**Achuka** is an independent children's book site that has something for everyone. [www.achuka.co.uk](http://www.achuka.co.uk)

**Barrington Stoke** is an award-winning publisher that makes books for reluctant, dyslexic, disenchanted and under-confident readers. [www.barringtonstoke.co.uk](http://www.barringtonstoke.co.uk) Tel: 0131 557 2020

**Booktrust** promotes children's reading and produces a wide range of information for young readers including booklists. [www.bookheads.org.uk](http://www.bookheads.org.uk) (website for teenagers)  
Tel: 020 8516 2977





**British Dyslexia Association** is the national organisation for specific learning difficulties. It represents over two million dyslexic children and adults. It is one of the world's leading dyslexia organisations. [www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk](http://www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk)  
Tel: 0118 966 8271 (helpline). There are many other support organisations for children with dyslexia. For more information visit [www.literacytrust.org.uk/links/special.html#dyslexia](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/links/special.html#dyslexia)

**Cool-reads** The cool-reads site is designed and run by Chris (15) and Tim (14) and features hundreds of cool-reads reviewed by 10-15 year olds. Children and teenagers can send in reviews or comments as well as play book games and quizzes, or join the cool-talk discussion forum. [www.cool-reads.co.uk](http://www.cool-reads.co.uk)

**The National Literacy Trust** is a charity dedicated to building a literate nation. The National Literacy Trust's website provides up-to-date information about literacy for all age groups in the UK. There is a section for parents including details of useful organisations, research, statistics, events, resources and links. [www.literacytrust.org.uk](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk) Tel: 020 7828 2435 for information and advice.

**The National Reading Campaign** is run by the National Literacy Trust for the DfES and promotes reading across all age groups. The NRC runs schemes such as Reading Champions that celebrates positive male role models for reluctant readers. To find out more about how the NRC can help, visit [www.readon.org.uk](http://www.readon.org.uk) Tel: 020 7828 2435 for help and advice.

**The Parent Centre** is the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) website for all parents and carers who want to help their child or children to learn. It offers support, information and advice about your child's learning and the English education system. [www.parentcentre.gov.uk](http://www.parentcentre.gov.uk)

**Parentline Plus** is a charity working with parents and families offering advice and information about a range of parenting issues. [www.parentlineplus.org.uk](http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk) Tel: 0808 800 2222 (free helpline).

**Reading Is Fundamental, UK** is an initiative of the National Literacy Trust that gives children the opportunity to choose and keep free books. The RIF, UK website offers parents advice and help on reading with their children, and also has a section for teenagers featuring author interviews, competitions and book giveaways. [www.rif.org.uk](http://www.rif.org.uk) Tel: 020 7828 2435.







Help your children to learn  
**Resources for parents**

Reference HYCL



Help your children to learn  
**Getting the most from school reports**

Reference HYCL/3



Help your children to learn  
**Making the most of parents' evenings**

Reference HYCL/1



Help your children to learn  
**Making the most of time with your child**

Reference HYCL/4



Help your children to learn  
**Formal meetings with teachers**

Reference HYCL/2



Help your children to learn  
**How is your child doing at school?**

Reference HYCL/5

Other leaflets in the series are also available.

If you would like to share your experiences, or you have any queries or require further information, please visit our website [www.parentcentre.gov.uk](http://www.parentcentre.gov.uk)



Help your children to learn  
**A guide to supporting reading for parents of primary school children**

Reference HYCL/7

This booklet was written by the National Literacy Trust working with parents in Scunthorpe, Leeds, Manchester and Runcorn.

Further copies of this leaflet, and others in the 'Help your children to learn' series, can be obtained from Prolog: 0845 60 222 60 quoting reference HYCL/8 for this leaflet and the references shown above for others in this series.