

For Parents: You've Got This

A calm-headed guide to the hardest, most worthwhile job you'll do this year: teaching your child to read.

This Is Hard — and That's Not a Sign You're Doing It Wrong

If you've felt your patience run out, cried a little after a rough reading session, or wondered if you're somehow failing your child, take a breath: you are not alone, and none of that means you're doing this wrong.

Learning to read is not a natural process the way learning to talk is. It has to be explicitly taught, sound by sound, pattern by pattern. That means frustration — for both of you — isn't a warning sign. It's simply part of how this particular skill gets built. Difficulty is part of learning, and helping your child move through it, rather than around it, is one of the most valuable things you can do for them.

Reading struggles can also weigh on how a child feels about themselves — some children become embarrassed or ashamed, or start to believe they're “not smart,” especially when the way they naturally learn doesn't match how the material is being presented to them. That belief is almost never true, and how you respond in these small daily moments is what quietly protects your child from ever forming it.

Remember this on the hard days:

A child who is struggling to read is not a child who isn't trying, and you are not a parent who isn't doing enough. You are both in the middle of something that takes time.

Building a “Culture of Error” at Home

One of the most powerful shifts you can make isn't in **what** you teach — it's in **how you talk about mistakes** while you teach it. When a mistake is treated as normal and expected, rather than something to fix quickly and move past, children stay willing to try, to guess, and to keep going.

A simple trick: use **“we”** language. “Let's figure this out” feels completely different to a child than “You got that wrong.” The first invites them to keep working alongside you. The second invites them to shut down.

Instead of saying...	Try saying...
<i>"No, that's wrong."</i>	"Ooh, I like that you tried the /k/ sound there — let's listen again together."
<i>"Try again." (flat, corrective)</i>	"I'm glad we caught that one — that's the tricky part of this word family."
<i>"You got it wrong."</i>	"That mistake just taught us something we needed to fix. Let's look at it together."
<i>Silently correcting for them</i>	"Oops, I misread that too! Even grown-ups do that — let's fix it together."
<i>"You always mix up these letters."</i>	"This letter pair trips up lots of readers — let's make it our next challenge."
<i>"We don't have time for this today."</i>	"Let's do a quick 5-minute round — short and steady beats long and stressed."

If Your Child Learns Differently

Every child's path to reading looks a little different, and that includes children who are gifted, children with dyslexia or other exceptionalities, and children who are both at once (sometimes called "twice-exceptional," or 2e). A child can be remarkably bright in conversation, full of ideas and vocabulary, and still find decoding genuinely difficult — and that combination is often missed, because the giftedness can mask the struggle, or the struggle can overshadow the giftedness.

If that sounds like your child, you're not imagining the mismatch, and it doesn't mean something is wrong with them. It means they may need support in more than one direction at once — continued challenge for what comes easily, alongside real, patient support for what doesn't.

A few things that help many different kinds of learners, whatever the underlying reason:

- **Use more than one sense at a time** — say a sound, see the letter, and trace or tap it out, rather than relying on sight alone.
- **Keep sessions short and frequent** rather than long and occasional — five focused minutes beats thirty tense ones.
- **Let your child's strengths lead sometimes** — if they love stories, vehicles, or a particular topic, read and practice through that interest.
- **Watch for patterns, not one bad day** — a single hard session is normal; a consistent, specific struggle over weeks is worth mentioning to a teacher or reading specialist.

When You Need to Calm Your Own Head First

Your child can feel your frustration even when you think you're hiding it well. None of us can be endlessly patient, and you don't need to be — you just need a couple of resets ready for the moments it gets hard.

- **Pause before you correct.** A two-second breath before you respond to a mistake is often the difference between a calm correction and a sharp one.
- **Name it out loud, gently, for yourself.** “This is a hard moment, and that’s okay” can lower the temperature for both of you.
- **End on something easy.** If a session is going badly, close with one word or sound your child already knows well, so you both end on a win, not a struggle.
- **Walk away and come back.** Stopping a session early because tempers are rising is not giving up — it’s protecting your child’s relationship with reading itself.

Words That Motivate

A few short phrases, ready for the moment you need them:

“You stuck with a hard one — that’s exactly how readers get stronger.”

“Your brain is building a new connection right now. That’s what this feeling is.”

“I noticed you tried three different sounds before you got it — that’s real effort.”

“We’re a team on this word. Let’s crack it together.”

One last thing

You showing up, again and again, to sit beside your child and work through something hard — that is the lesson underneath the lesson. Long after the word families are mastered, what your child will remember is that you didn't give up on them, and that mistakes were always safe to make next to you.