

Helping Your Early Reader at Home

Early readers must develop an arsenal of word-solving strategies to help them with the process of decoding. When we were growing up, the primary prompt used when a child got stuck on a word was “sound it out.” While there is an equivalent contemporary phrase, there are several other phrases you can use with your child to help him or her apply different strategies for supporting both the decoding and meaning-making that must be integrated for reading *with understanding* to take place.

- **“Get your mouth ready for it.”**

This prompt helps beginning readers articulate the beginning sound, which can be enough, in a given context, for them to make an accurate prediction.

- **“Read/Look all the way through the word.”**

For readers who focus only on the beginning sound, this prompt helps them attend to ending sounds.

- **“Look inside the word.”**

For a reader who overlooks the vowel sounds on the inside of words.

- **“Does that look right?”**

When a reader substitutes a word that is not visually similar, this can be a useful prompt. IF the substitution makes sense, affirm that first. For example, if a child substitutes “horse” for “pony,” you might say, **“Horse makes sense, but this word looks different.”**

- **“Something tricked you.”**

Use this prompt to have your child go back and reread *a whole line*, looking for something s/he misread. Readers have to be able to find what “tricked” them, so don’t point to the word they misread for them.

- **“Does that make sense?”**

When your child reads “house” for “horse” and there is a horse in the picture, the substitution doesn’t make sense. Children need to know that reading is supposed to make sense, so when meaning breaks down, you need to go back and help them solve the break-down.

- **“Can the picture help you?”**

As adults, we sometimes think that using the pictures is “cheating!” In fact, pictures support meaning-making *and* sight-word development. Reading is *primarily* about making meaning, not about saying the words correctly. As children read with meaning and fluency, they integrate words into their sight word vocabulary. They are not only successfully decoding a text about a horse, they are absorbing information about what the word “horse” looks like.