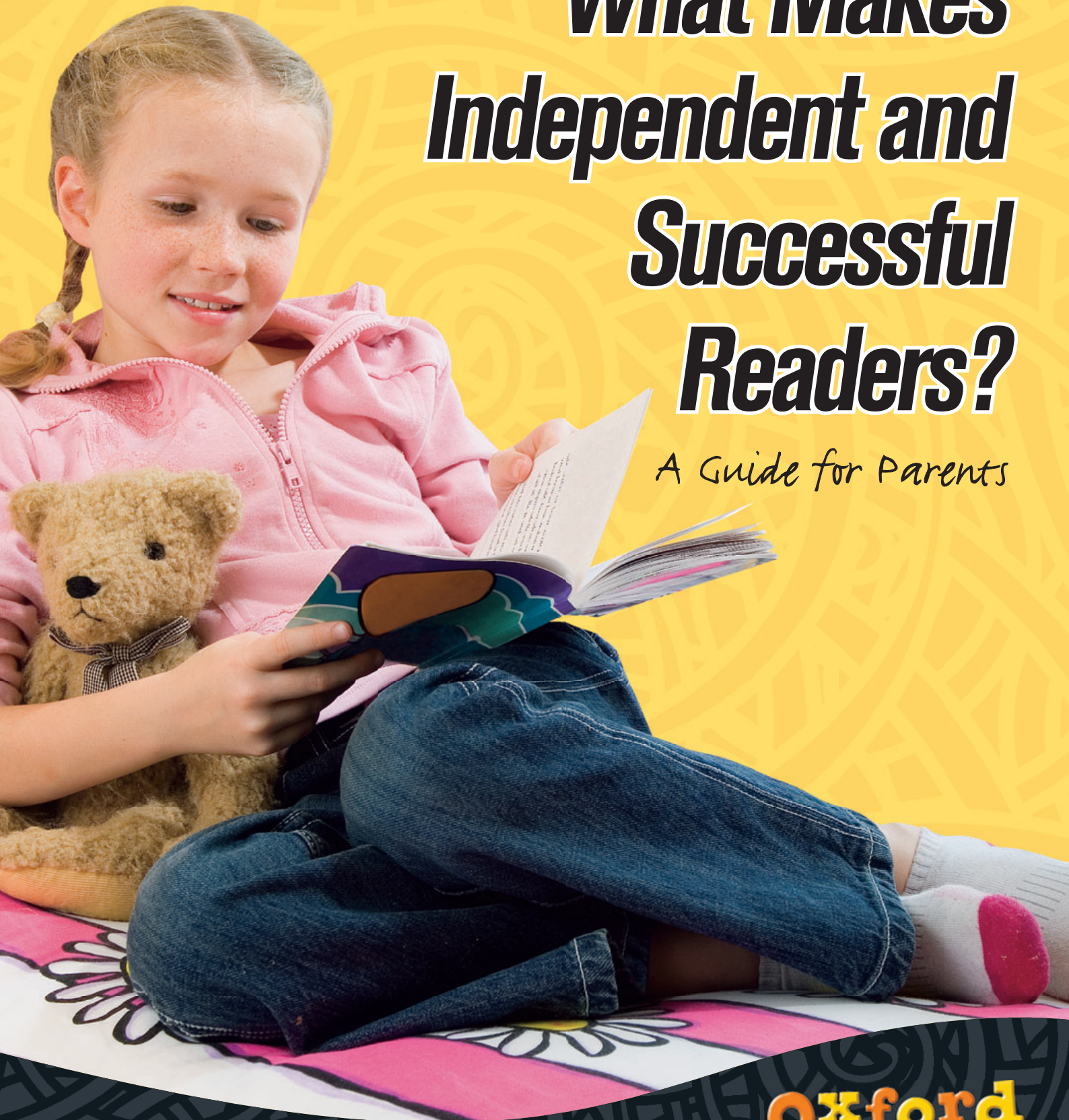


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What Makes Independent and Successful Readers?

A Guide for Parents



oxford
literacy

Reading is for enjoyment and learning, and independent and successful readers use a range of strategies to understand an author's message. They:

- ▶ are interested in reading
- ▶ expect to understand what they are reading
- ▶ 'get into' the book
- ▶ know there are different types of books (story books, information books, picture books, comics)
- ▶ know they need to use different reading strategies for some books
- ▶ realise when they have stopped understanding what they are reading
- ▶ select an appropriate strategy to use when they are not understanding
- ▶ don't give up if their first strategy is not successful
- ▶ know they make errors but are optimistic they will understand the book
- ▶ 'get' what the author is trying to say.

Why do children want to become readers?

- ▶ Children are interested in the world and being able to read allows them to learn about their interests.
- ▶ Children may want to read about characters connected to movies, television shows, toys and sporting teams.
- ▶ Children may want to read books that their friends read.

How do children become readers?

Education doesn't just start on the first day of school. Before starting school, children are already building up their listening and speaking abilities which provide the foundation for reading and writing skills. Some children may identify familiar letters (such as those in their own name), repeat jingles and rhymes, ask for the same book to be read again and again, and be starting to make writing marks on all kinds of surfaces! They are on the way to becoming readers and writers.



How can I encourage my child to read?

Talk with your child. Speaking and listening provides your child with different ways to learn and think about the world.

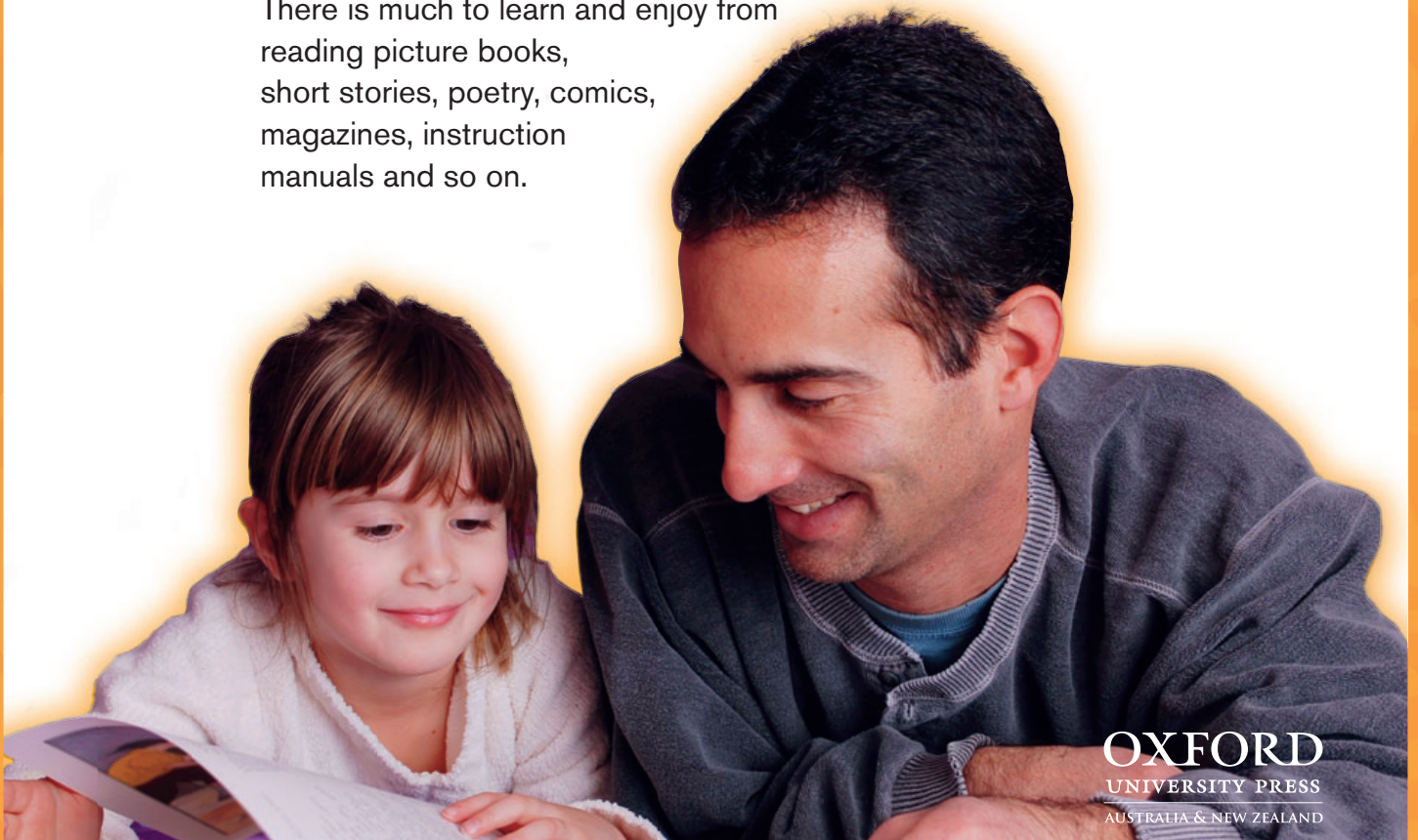
Provide a positive role model. Chat about what you are reading in books, newspapers and magazines, or viewing on screens.

Read to your child every day. This is not always possible but it may be that you point out words when you are travelling, read something aloud from a newspaper, magazine or book, or point out something interesting on screen.

Listen to your child read. All children like to receive positive feedback and listening to your child read is a great opportunity to congratulate him or her on what has been achieved.

Encourage your child to read from a wide range of sources.

There is much to learn and enjoy from reading picture books, short stories, poetry, comics, magazines, instruction manuals and so on.



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Why do teachers send books home to be read?

Teachers listen to your child read, record how he or she has read a book and then respond to this information by planning activities to meet his or her learning needs. Teachers send books home so children will have valuable opportunities to practise what is taught at school.

Your child may have already read the book that is sent home and be able to tell you about it. However, as with any developing skill, additional practice will help your child to improve.

Another benefit of reading a take-home book with your child is that you can get a sense of how he or she is progressing. Reading together is a great opportunity for you to give positive feedback about the progress that has been made.

When can I find time for my child to read the take-home book?

Children arrive home from school looking for relaxation and entertainment. How this 'down time' is used is different for all children—it may involve playing sport, watching television, using a computer, attending interest clubs, seeing friends or enjoying time alone.

So, how might you fit reading the take-home book into a busy day? The ideal situation would be to sit with your child and read the book together, but that's not always possible. Here's how you might manage one busy weeknight scenario.

CASE STUDY

Reading a book in the car

As you are travelling in the car, ask your child to read to you from the back seat. While you can't see the book, you'll know whether what is said 'sounds right'. If what your child is reading doesn't sound right, you could say:

- ▶ *Sorry, I missed that bit. Can you read it to me again?*
- ▶ *I'm not sure what the author meant there.*
- ▶ *I love that bit. Read it to me again.*
- ▶ *So what was (the character) doing?*
- ▶ *I wish I could see the pictures/photos/drawings. Tell me about them.*
- ▶ *Who was it that said...?*
- ▶ *What did they say about...?*
- ▶ *What did you just say?*

Reading a book at home

If you are able to listen to your child read at home, there are a few points to consider:

- ▶ Set aside a usual time for reading because routine helps to develop a readiness to read.
- ▶ Let your child choose the place for reading. Successful reading can happen on the floor, on the back verandah, and in the cubby house!
- ▶ Encourage your child to hold the book so he or she becomes familiar with handling it (turning the pages, lifting the flaps and so on).



What if my child refuses to read?

What should you do if your child doesn't want to read the take-home book?

You may hear comments such as:

- ▶ *Do I have to?*
- ▶ *I'm too tired.*
- ▶ *The teacher didn't say I had to.* (Check with the teacher so you know what is expected.)
- ▶ *I forgot to bring it home.* (Check your child's school bag.)
- ▶ *But I'm playing with...*
- ▶ *Can't I just finish...?*
- ▶ *That book's boring/dumb/stupid...*

It's at this point that you may like to use one of the following strategies—because *some* reading practice is better than *no* reading practice!

- ▶ Use a timer (kitchen, sport) so your child understands that the reading practice will be for a short amount of time.
- ▶ Read the book aloud to your child.
- ▶ Read the book aloud to your child but have your child read words that you know he or she can already read.
- ▶ Have your child point to the words while you read the words aloud.

- ▶ Read aloud together.
- ▶ Read half the book each (and yes, your child can have the page with fewer words).

- ▶ Suggest to your child that he or she reads onto a voice recorder or into a microphone (even if it does not work).
- ▶ Ask your child to read to a stuffed toy; for example, a favourite teddy bear. (The author has seen this work very successfully with a number of children.) Your child could also read to a willing sibling or placid pet.

After reading the book, it is essential that both of you chat about the author's message. This is for you to confirm that your child understands that reading is for enjoyment and learning and is not just about correctly naming the words (although this is certainly important).



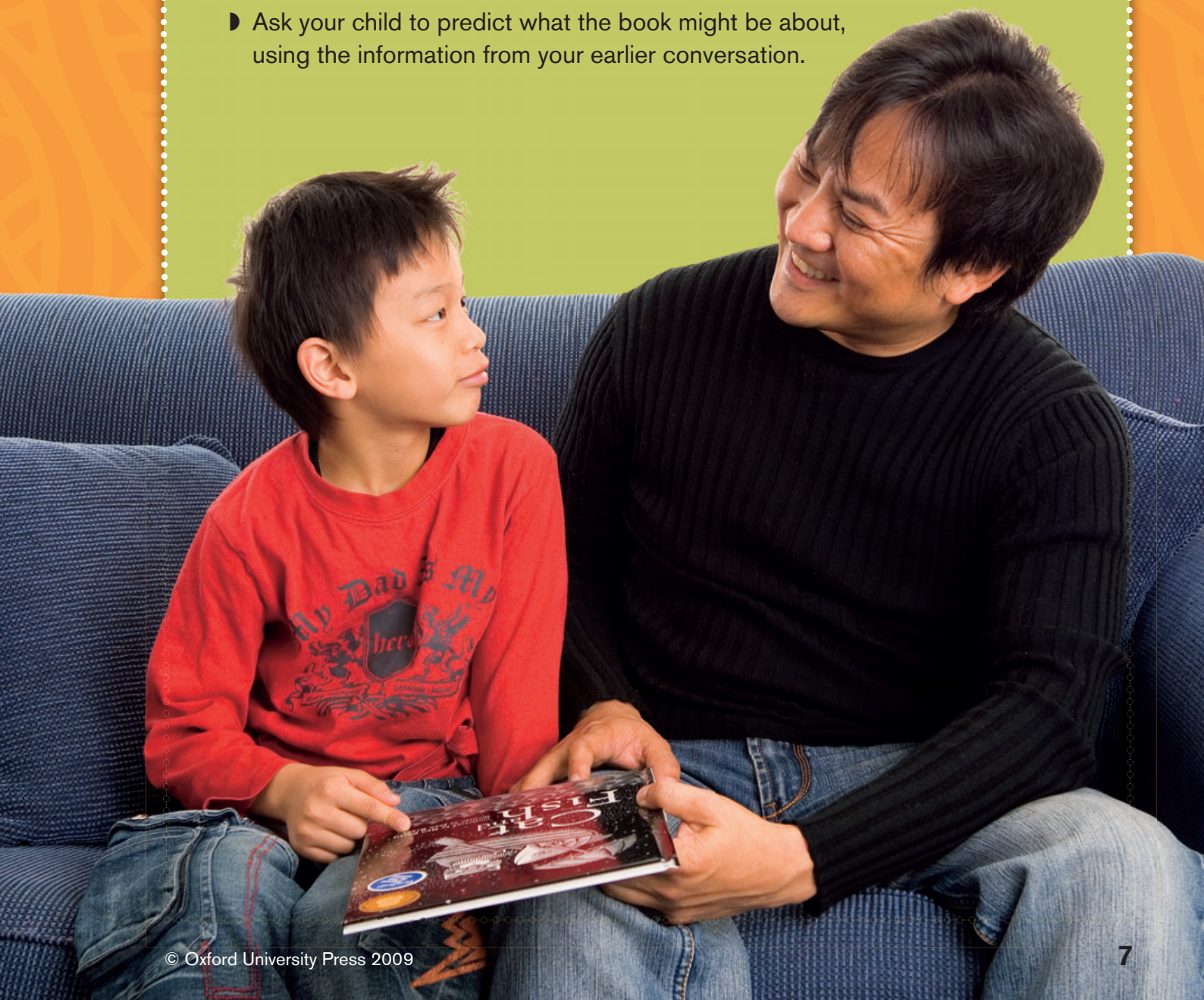
Why talk about books before reading them?

Introducing a book is necessary for children of all ages. As adults, we do our own introductions when we are selecting what to read. We read the blurb, look at the number of pages, the size of the font, the author's name (familiar and comfortable, or new and intriguing), and glance at the photos, illustrations, diagrams and so on. Children need to be introduced to this process as well. It is much easier to read a book if you already know something about it.

If your child has already read the book at school, then your discussion about it may be short. You may just like to ask your child what you can expect to hear him or her to be reading about.

A new book may need a longer conversation. You can do this in a range of ways:

- ▶ Chat about the title, author, pictures and blurb.
- ▶ If your child has read a book about the same topic or by the same author, discuss what seems to be the same or different about this book.
- ▶ Discuss how to say the names of characters and places in the book.
- ▶ Ask your child to predict what the book might be about, using the information from your earlier conversation.



What should I do if my child can't work out a word?

When listening to your child read, it is often tempting to correct the mistakes he or she makes. While it may seem helpful to do this, your child does not need to be reminded about how much you know. Being interrupted can also lead your child to lose his or her place or to become distracted.

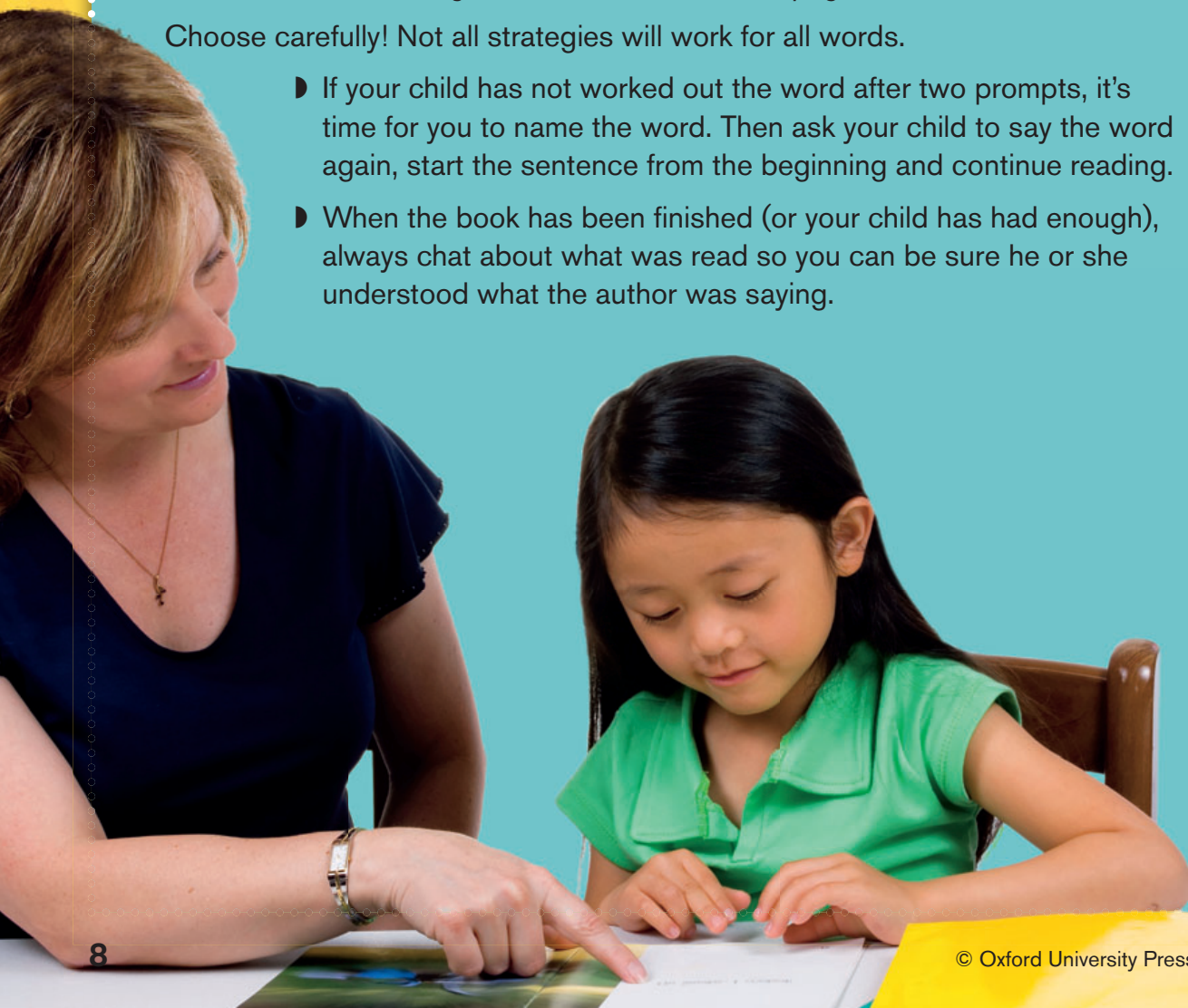
You need to give your child time to work out an unfamiliar word or, if the attempt is unsuccessful, for you to share strategies that can be used.

If your child pauses while reading, wait for five seconds to allow time to work out the word. Then give a helpful prompt; for example:

- ▶ *What do you think you could do to work out the word?*
- ▶ *Look at the first letter. Look at the last letter. Look at the letters in between. What do you think the word might be?*
- ▶ *Does it look like any other words you already know?*
- ▶ *Try sounding it out.*
- ▶ *Try breaking the word into syllables.*
- ▶ *Read the sentence again.*
- ▶ *Read to the end of the sentence. Any idea?*
- ▶ *Does it make sense in the story?*
- ▶ *Does that word look right for what else is on the page?*

Choose carefully! Not all strategies will work for all words.

- ▶ If your child has not worked out the word after two prompts, it's time for you to name the word. Then ask your child to say the word again, start the sentence from the beginning and continue reading.
- ▶ When the book has been finished (or your child has had enough), always chat about what was read so you can be sure he or she understood what the author was saying.





What if my child 'reads' the pictures?

Most children go through a stage of looking at the pictures in order to 'read' the book, but at some point there will be fewer or no pictures in particular books. If your child appears to read the pictures, you may like to use the following strategies to encourage your child to focus on the words:

- ▶ As a page is turned, cover the picture/s and have your child read the words on the page. *What do you think the picture/s will look like?*
- ▶ As a page is turned, cover the words and ask your child to look at the picture/s. *What do you think the words will be?* Uncover the words then have your child read the words to check whether the predictions are correct!

Talking for understanding

Sometimes it is useful to ask a question while your child is reading, to confirm his or her understandings or to suggest a strategy; for example:

- ▶ *What do you think this says here?*
- ▶ *Find the part where it says that...*
- ▶ *On this page, I can see a word you have learned. Can you find it?*
- ▶ *What word on this line tells you that...?*
- ▶ *Listen while I read a line. See if you can find it. Hint: Select a line near the bottom of the page!*
- ▶ *How do you know that...?*
- ▶ *Find the words starting with 'b' on this page.*
- ▶ *Do you see any of the letters in your name on this page?*
- ▶ *Find the words with 'in' on this page.*
- ▶ *Cover a word that can be predicted with your finger. What word do you think it might be?*
- ▶ *Show me the part that tells us about the picture.*

What if the book seems too hard or too easy for my child to read?

A book may be too difficult for your child if he or she hasn't been introduced to it or if it is written in an unfamiliar style. For example, your child may easily read a fiction story but find it difficult to read a non-fiction book.

If the take-home book seems too difficult and your child is getting frustrated then it is time to stop. You can ease out of the situation by making one of the following comments:

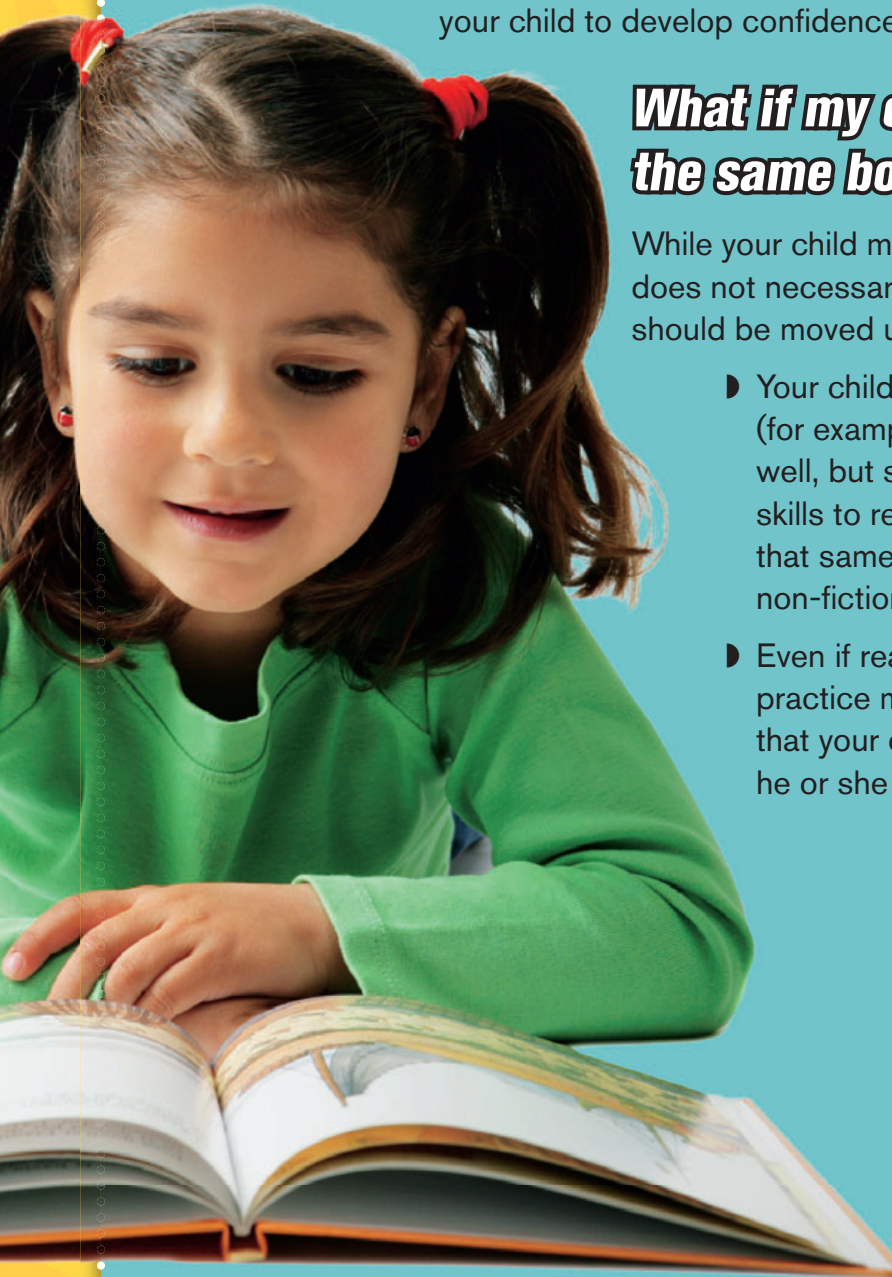
- ▶ *This seems like hard work. Let's stop and read something else.*
- ▶ *How about I finish reading the book and you can be ready to tell me what it was about?*

Teachers introduce new reading strategies by using books at a slightly challenging level. They are not generally used as take-home books. However, there are occasions when a take-home book is too difficult. Be sure to let the teacher know. Reading easy and familiar books at home helps your child to develop confidence and skills.

What if my child is stuck on the same book level?

While your child may read a book easily, it does not necessarily mean that he or she should be moved up to the next level. Why?

- ▶ Your child may read that book *type* (for example, fiction stories) very well, but still need practice developing skills to read other types of books at that same level (for example, non-fiction books).
- ▶ Even if reading is word-perfect, more practice may be needed to make sure that your child is understanding what he or she is reading.





How can I get my child to read more books at home?

If your child does not choose to do extra reading at home, try to locate books about his or her interests. Finding out more about things your child already likes can be very appealing to him or her. Where do you get these books?

- ▶ Borrow from your local library. Your child may not be able to read the whole book but may be able to read some sections, and the photos, illustrations and drawings can be interesting to chat about. You could read some parts of the book to your child.
- ▶ Borrow from family and friends.
- ▶ Buy from second-hand bookshops.
- ▶ Buy from council libraries when they have their annual sales.
- ▶ Buy from garage sales and fetes. It's surprising what can be found at very cheap prices.
- ▶ Use the Internet. There are many sites where you can download free books or buy them at cheap prices.

Remember, too, that while your child may be reluctant to read regular books, he or she may read many other types of texts; for example, magazines, webpages and so on. This is still 'reading'.

Think about what *you* read for work, leisure and family obligations. Use these to broaden your child's reading experiences and provide opportunities to read, chat, enjoy and learn.

- ▶ websites
- ▶ accounts
- ▶ text messages
- ▶ school notices
- ▶ memos
- ▶ newsletters
- ▶ recipe books
- ▶ newspapers
- ▶ instruction manuals
- ▶ magazines
- ▶ signs
- ▶ menus
- ▶ forms
- ▶ emails
- ▶ What else?



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