

Pointers For Parents

Your Child: At Risk For Reading Difficulties?

(NAPSA)—As you read this, you may care to reflect on what an extraordinary skill you are using. Unlike learning to speak, which happens naturally, learning to read must be acquired. For one in five children in America, it is a frustrating and persistent problem.

“Often the problem is a weakness in the phonological system of the brain, which hinders the ability to identify sounds within words or to detect rhymes and even learn the alphabet,” says Dr. Andrea Pastorok of Kumon Math & Reading Centers. How can parents know if pre-reading skills are developing properly?

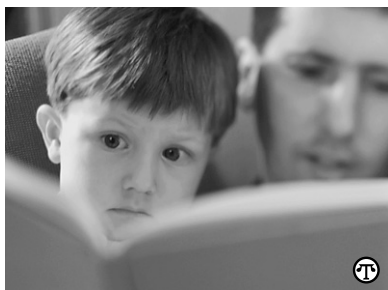
Dr. Pastorok recommends that parents:

1. Listen to Your Child Speak. If certain sounds are “fuzzy” to your child, he or she may experience some of the following problems that could indicate future reading difficulty:

- **Delayed speech.** Most children speak their first words by the time they are 14 months old, but some do not speak their first words until they are at least 15 months old and do not speak in phrases until they are two years old.

- **Difficulty with pronunciation that persists past five or six years of age.** Mispronunciation problems are especially noticeable when children try to pronounce new or long words. Other examples of mispronunciations include omitting the first sound (e.g., “pacific” for “specific”) or inverting the sounds within words (e.g., “aminal” for “animal”).

- **Insensitivity to rhyme.** Although most three and four year olds love rhyming games, some children are unaware that words can be broken into smaller



Early intervention, experts say, is the best way to prevent and treat reading problems in children.

units of sound, and also cannot detect that certain words rhyme. This is worrisome if they have reached kindergarten age.

- **Imprecise language.** Children who are insensitive to the sound structure of language may have difficulty retrieving words they know and resort to using vague words such as “thing” and “stuff” to cover up. An inability to distinguish between two words with similar sounds (e.g., “volcano” and “tornado”) may also cause them to retrieve the wrong word.

- **Difficulty learning the names and sounds of the alphabet.**

2. Look Into Your Family History. Struggling readers run in families. When a child is diagnosed as a struggling reader, it is common to find that a parent or sibling is one also.

Interpreting these early clues is important because early intervention is the best way to prevent and treat reading problems.

Dr. Pastorok is an educational specialist with Kumon Math and Reading Centers. She has a doctorate in educational psychology, a master's degree in counseling psychology and more than 30 years experience working with children.