



How parents can help kids beat reading trouble

By Tyra Damm

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How do you know if your child's reading skills are on track? How do you encourage reluctant readers to read more often? How do you know if there's an underlying learning disability? And if there's a diagnosis, what kind of help does your child need?

Dr. Jill Allor, an education professor at Southern Methodist University, has answers to these often-overwhelming questions. On Saturday, she's leading free workshops for parents of young elementary-age children.

We visited this week about some of the challenges that young readers face and how parents can help. Here are excerpts.

What will you cover in the workshops?

My goal is get people some good information so they can seek further assistance if needed. I'm planning on covering early signs of dyslexia and other reading problems.

I'll have a very simple word list that kids exiting kindergarten and first grade should be able to read.

I'll have some suggestions of things to do over the summer. Practice words, how to select text for kids to read. Choosing text in the early stages is really difficult.

We'll also talk about what to do when working through a book.

How can parents best assess how their children are reading?

They should take the information that their schools give them.

There are some good books out there that give some help. If you have real concerns, I highly recommend *Overcoming Dyslexia* by Sally Shaywitz. Another one that's a little easier to read is *Straight Talk About Reading* by Susan Hall and Louisa Moats.

They need to dig a little deeper. There's not a quick answer.

How can you identify reading problems early?

You can't go by letter reversals. Every kid does that.

But we can tell with pretty good accuracy, 80 percent or higher, from brief screening tests, who will have

trouble learning to read. Particularly in kindergarten. Then you give them assistance right away.

The first skill to look for is phonological awareness. It's a child's ability to know that individual spoken words are made up of sounds.

If you say, "What's the first sound in fun?" and they can say "ffff" they have some phonological awareness. This is the kid who can recognize rhyming words. You have to know the ending part sounds the same.

If they have trouble with rhyming, I'd want a little more screening.

The good news is this is a skill that can definitely be taught.

What is the next step if you find delays?

You need to talk to your child's schools about services and assessments. You need to ask for a full assessment and get good advice.

What are some of your personal favorite books for younger readers?

I love Dr. Seuss. If your child is having trouble with Dr. Seuss in the middle of first grade, then that's an indication that there might be some trouble.

What is a reasonable expectation for how often children should read in the summer?

There's no set criteria. It just needs to be done routinely. It would be good if it happened daily. For kids who are struggling, it needs to happen every day.

How do you encourage kids to read in the summer?

It depends on the child. What's motivating to your child and where are they in their development? If it's not an easy process yet, it takes more motivation. You may need external reinforcers. Reward them for doing good work.

Find something they really enjoy. What do they want to know about? They don't have to read a book. It could be a magazine or something online.

Tyra Damm is a Briefing columnist. Email her at tyradamm@gmail.com.

What: "How Do I Help My Child Become a Successful Reader?"

When: 1 to 2 p.m. Saturday for kindergarten and first-grade parents; 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. for second- and third-grade parents

Where: Room 144, Annette Caldwell Simmons Hall, SMU

Cost: Free

RSVP: Email melindam@smu.edu or call 214-768-2220

Shannon Frantz, Trinity Christian Academy's Lower School library assistant, offers these tips for parents

who want to encourage reading this summer.

Know what your child is interested in and try to find a series that will appeal to him.

Visit local library programs.

Designate an “unplug day” — no electronics.

Model reading as a parent.

Use audiobooks on car trips.

Try to make reading a daily practice at home with magazines, comics, cookbooks, etc. You don't have to read a huge chapter book all the time.

Suggested book series:

Freddy and the French Fries by David Baldacci

Around the World in 80 Mysteries by Carole Marsh

Masters of Disasters by Carole Marsh

Hank Zipzer by Henry Winkler

A to Z Mysteries by Ron Roy

My Weird School by Dan Gutman

Mercy Watson by Kate DiCamillo

Roscoe Riley Rules by Katherine Applegate

Hank the Cowdog by John Erickson

The Black Lagoon by Mark Thaler

Individual books:

Hatchet by Gary Paulsen

Stupendous Dodgeball Fiasco by Janice Repka

The Gollywopper Games by Jody Feldman

One-handed Catch by Mary Jane Auch

The Doll People by Ann Martin

Any books by Roald Dahl

The Candymakers by Wendy Mass