

Practical advice for helping children with their reading at home

	Key milestones & advice for parents
Age 4	<p>By the age of four...</p> <p>Most children of this age go to nursery. Children understand and say lots of words and sentences now. You can see them using their talking to meet new friends or to work out problems. They talk to find out new information by asking lots of questions.</p> <p>Taking part</p> <p>Your four year old will be able to take turns as well as be starting to share with adults and other children. He will enjoy playing with other children and start a conversation. Your child will listen to longer stories and answer questions about a story they have just heard, for example, simple questions such as “Who did Cinderella dance with at the ball?”, “Were Cinderella’s sisters kind?”</p> <p>Four year olds use talk in different ways. They use it to organise themselves and their play and they like make-believe and dressing up. They start to like simple jokes – though often their own jokes make little sense.</p> <p>Can your child?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does your child like to play and talk with others? • Does your child enjoy sharing books with you, especially ones with rhymes? • Is your child starting to be able to plan games with others? <p>Speech sounds</p> <p>Your four year old uses most sounds correctly but may still have difficulty with “th”, “r”, “sh”, “ch” and “j”. Children of this age still find sounds within words with several syllables tricky, e.g. escalator. Errors where words have groups of consonants are still common, e.g. “bider” instead of spider.</p>
Age 5	<p>By the age of five...</p> <p>By the age of five, almost all children will be in school. At this stage they need to learn how to listen, understand and share their ideas within the classroom. They also need to understand words and phrases used in school that they may not have heard at home – such as “line up”, “packed lunch” and “talk to your partner” etc.</p> <p>They also still need to have conversations – to share information, to make friends and explain how they are feeling. They use talk to help work out problems and organise thinking and activities.</p> <p>Understanding of language</p> <p>Your child can follow a short sequence of instructions just by listening, rather than stopping to look at the speaker. During a conversation children of this age can answer questions and provide more information when asked. They are beginning to understand time concepts like the days of the week, morning, afternoon, day and night. They can understand more complicated language such as “first”, “last”, “might”, “maybe”, “above” and “in between”. They understand words that describe sequences such as “first we are going to the shop, next we will play in the park”. Simple stories can be followed without pictures.</p> <p>Can your child?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can your five year old listen for instructions while they are busy with something else? E.g. ask them to get their coat and shoes while they are playing (not TV or computer, as they are too absorbing).

- Is your child beginning to get the idea of time? E.g. "Mummy will be here after lunch."
- Does your child understand a longer list of instructions? E.g. "First get your plate, then sit on the red chair."
- If you describe an object or person, can your child guess who or what you are talking about?
- Can your child predict what will happen next in familiar events and routines?

Use of words and sentences

Your five year old can have conversations. They know lots of words and can use longer sentences that are better formed, e.g. "I had spaghetti for tea at Jamilia's house". They can link sentences using words like "and" and "because". They like to talk about and explain what they are doing. They can talk to you about what they do and do not like.

Can your child?

- Can your child organise their thoughts and put longer sentences together?
- Can your child re-tell short stories in roughly the right order and use language that makes it sound like a story?
- Can you usually follow what your child is saying?

Speech sounds

Your five year old can use most sounds correctly. Long words like "elephant" can still be tricky, and some speech sounds such as "r" and "th" and three consonant combinations, e.g. "scribble" may still be difficult.

Can your child?

- Do they regularly get frustrated or give up trying to tell you something?
- Do they regularly forget the words or miss out important pieces of information?
- Do they sound muddled and disorganised in their talking?

Age 5-7

By the age of seven...

Your seven year old is at the perfect age to take new things in very quickly. They will have learnt a lot about how to listen and ask for help if they don't understand. They can tell you stories, ask you 'why', use exciting language and take turns with their friends.

Hear it, get it

Your seven year old can listen to you when you ask a question or give them an instruction and work out which bits of information are important. They know when they don't understand and can ask you to explain, e.g. "Is the author the one that writes the story and the pictures are done by someone else?" Your seven year old can understand instructions with two or three parts that are more complicated, e.g. "Choose a person from the story we've just read, tell me how they feel at the end of the story and why you think that is."

Can your child?

Play a game

Get a list of words from a topic your child is learning at school. Choose one word and challenge your child to say it in a sentence. Does it make sense?

Story telling

Choose a story you both know well, e.g. Red Riding Hood. Talk about the wolf. Is he good or bad? Ask your child to say why they think he is good or bad. What's in the story that tells them?

Words up

Your seven year old is learning lots of new words and can put words together by meaning as well as how they sound and look.

Your child is learning to compare words in different ways, by look, sound and meaning, e.g. "Bare and bear sound the same but they mean different things."
They can guess words when given clues like shape, size and letters, e.g. "It's a large animal, grey with thick skin, not an elephant and it starts with the letter 'h'."
Your seven year old will enjoy using new words they're learning and telling you what they mean, e.g. "symmetry is when you draw a line down a shape and it's the same on each side."

Play word games

There are lots of games to play with your child. Here are some examples,

- opposites, say a word and then think of the opposite, e.g. hot, cold
- the yes/no game, challenge your child do talk to you without using yes or no, it's quite hard to do!
- describing word charades, your child thinks of an action, e.g. swimming, adds a describing word, for example slowly and acts it out for you to guess.

Age 7-11

By the age of nine...

By the age of 9 your child knows the rules of talking and is using this to mix with others and build friendships. They can tell exciting stories with a beginning, middle and end and are starting to use this in their writing. The words they know and use are helping them to think and learn.

Hear it, follow it, get it

Your 9 year old can listen to you and work out which bits of information are important. They can also read your mood to understand what you're NOT saying, e.g. "I said dinner is on the table!" [Mum's getting cross so we'd better go to the table now]

If they don't understand your 9 year old can ask for the information they need from you but be patient, they will need time to think first.

Can my child?

Quiz me – do quizzes with your child where you say a sentence and they have to tell you what they can guess from what you say, e.g. I need my umbrella – what am I not telling you?

Words up

Your 9 year old can talk about events using time and measurement, e.g. "Next Friday we're going to Granny's house and the train will take one hour." They can use words to describe actions and their effects, e.g. "If I don't take my coat to school I'll be cold because there is frost on the road this morning". They are learning and using new words that are linked to different subjects, e.g. "That goal was not allowed because their team had a man offside".

Shape spotting – when you are out and about get your child to look for unusual shapes, can they name them and say what they know about them, e.g. an octagon has 8 sides, like an octopus has 8 legs.

Say it loud and proud

Your 9 year old speaks clearly and fluently about past, present and future events. They don't often make mistakes when reading or speaking unusual word endings, e.g. brought, fish, peace.

Your child will be using their voice to explain their meaning, e.g. "Helpful?" she cried, "you must be joking!"

They will be using longer, more complicated sentences to plan and explain their thoughts, e.g. "We decided Jenny will run first because she's fast and will give us a good start, me and Jack will go in the middle and Waleed will go last because he is really sporty."

Can my child?

Planning – ask your child to help you to plan a party or an event and talk to you about what needs to be done, e.g. a brother/sister's birthday party.

Tell me a story

Your 9 year old is able to tell good, exciting stories that have a clear beginning, an interesting middle and an ending. They are using their voices to make their stories come to life and changing

the information they give depending on who they are talking to.

Your child can relate what they tell to the interests of the listener, e.g. "Guess who I saw yesterday..."

Telling stories – get your child to make up stories to tell you and other people in the family, especially younger brothers or sisters.

Chatting and mixing

Your 9 year old knows when to talk and when to listen. They can change what they say to fit the situation, sometimes giving less detail sometimes more. They know some situations when they need to use formal language, e.g. showing a visitor around the school.

Your child can keep conversations going with different people by asking questions and making comments. With their friends they are now using different types of chat which help them get along well and have good friendships, e.g. "I like your scarf" (compliments), "Don't be rude to Taryn" (criticising), "I don't like playing that game", (clarifying), "Why don't we play with Anna today?" (negotiating).

Can my child?

- Look – Is your child happy in a group of friends and able to mix and play with them well?
- Listen – Does your child talk in the right way to different people or do they sometimes seem rude?

By the age of eleven ...

By the age of 11 your child is good at listening and is using language fully in lots of different ways to explain, describe and share. They share ideas and information to help their thinking and learning. They have good friendships which are independent of you.

Hear it, follow it, get it

Your 11 year old can listen for longer and notice HOW things are said. They get sarcasm when it's obvious, e.g. "My favourite cup, broken, now that was really clever!"

Your child has a sense of humour and gets simple jokes even if they can't explain why they are funny.

Your 11 year old knows there are different kinds of questions,

e.g. open questions – "Tell me about your day"

closed questions – "Did you have a good day?"

rhetorical questions – "Wasn't your day great!"

Can my child?

Question time – get your child to ask you the same question in different ways, e.g. "What shall we go and see at the cinema?", open, "Can we go to the cinema?", closed, "It would be fun to go to the cinema wouldn't it?" rhetorical.

You're joking! – share jokes and funny stories with your child.

Words up

Your 11 year old has LOTS of words they know and can use. They can talk about feelings now as well as actions. Your child will be using grown-up words although sometimes they won't get it right, e.g. "I had to co-operate really hard to get the work done."

Your child knows that words can have two meanings and can use them correctly, e.g. watch (the TV and on your wrist), bark (like a dog and on a tree).

Can my child?

Homework help – work with your child to make lists of words for their school topics and use a dictionary together to find out their meanings.

Talk to your child as you would another adult using 'grown up' language.

Say it loud and proud

Your 11 year old speaks clearly and fluently and uses long and complex sentences. They use joining words to make their language flow, e.g. meanwhile, therefore, yet. They also use different kinds of questions to help conversations move on.

Your child can tell you about some grammar rules and they can see and hear when a sentence is not correct, e.g. "We was (are) going to the park today".

Can my child?

Grammar rules – ask your child to tell you basic grammar rules and give examples. If they have younger siblings encourage them to find a simple way to explain sentences to them too.

Tell me a story

Story telling is important to your 11 year old for their school work and for their friendships. Your child can tell you long and entertaining stories full of detail and description. They can put sub-plots into their stories and then return to the main story line.

Your 11 year old can talk in detail about things that have happened some time ago or are planned for the future.

Play story detectives – ask your child to tell you about the books they are reading or the TV programmes they are watching. Can they say what will happen in the next chapter/episode and can they say why they know this?

Chatting and mixing

Your 11 year old is good at using language in their friendships and relationships. They have strong bonds with others and take notice of what other people think and feel. They enjoy playing group games and can explain rules and work out with others how to agree.

At school your child can organise others in a group to do a task without the teacher's help and can see when others don't understand and will try to help them.

Can my child?

- Look – Can your child organise a game with a group of friends and explain the rules so everyone can understand.
- Listen – Is your child able to talk through arguments and problems when they come up and find a way to make it work.

Help

Any concerns?

It is important to remember that all children are different and your child may develop at a faster or slower rate than others. If your child goes to school then you can speak to them first. It is always helpful to have information about how your child talks and communicates in other places.

Learning to talk is a complicated process and no children get it right straight away. Usually children have learned to talk clearly by the time they are four. By this age, usually everyone can understand them, even people who don't know them very well. Sometimes children can be slow to develop their speech sounds, or find it really difficult, and this can make them hard to understand.

If you are concerned about your child's speech, language and communication development, for example, you think that they communicate less than other children their age, you should contact your health visitor, children's centre or local speech and language therapist and talk to them about your child. You can contact a speech and language therapist yourself; you do not need to go through your GP or health visitor though Speech and Language Therapy services are run differently depending on where you live. You can get free resources and check out your child's speech, language and communication development at www.talkingpoint.org.uk