



Books Open Doors, Reading Opens Minds



Supporting reluctant readers

Practical tips for parents of primary-aged children

① Understanding reading reluctance



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Understanding Reading Reluctance



It is completely normal for children in primary school to face challenges when it comes to reading. However, reading reluctance does not have to be a constant battle. By identifying the reason behind a child's reluctance, we can unlock the solution, allowing us to then provide clear guidance and support.



A child's reading journey is often not linear. They don't always make straightforward progress as we would like them to. The ups and downs they face, however, are natural fluctuations that are all part of the learning process. They are not a sign your child is failing in reading.

Every child is unique and the root of their reluctance can vary widely. Therefore, it is important we take the time to understand the reason behind a reluctance to read. Is it frustration? Avoidance? A learning difficulty? Once we understand the reason why, we can start to understand what they truly need to help them move forward and learn to love reading.

In this guide, we will explore some of the most common reasons why primary-aged children might resist reading. Recognising these factors early on can make a world of difference in how we support their reading journey. Once we have identified the potential barriers, we can better equip ourselves to remove them, leading to children who view reading in a more positive light.



"The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go."

-Dr Seuss



There are many reasons a child may become reluctant to read. Here are just a few that perhaps you may recognise in your own child.

Struggling with phonics or decoding

Lack of confidence compared to peers

Not finding books they enjoy

Not being exposed to varied genres

Short attention spans



“There are many little ways to enlarge your child’s world. Love of books is the best of all.”

-Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis





Struggling with phonics and decoding:

When a child finds phonics challenging, reading can quickly become exhausting. When every letter is a struggle to sound out, the excitement of the actual story is often completely lost, as children are working so hard on decoding that they cannot even begin to remember the book's plot. This becomes incredibly frustrating and can lead to avoiding reading altogether.



Lack of confidence compared to peers:

Children are hyper-aware of their surroundings, and this includes the successes of their peers. Some children can also be very competitive. These two things together can wreak havoc on a child's confidence if they begin to notice that other children in their class are reading at a level that is higher than their own.

Not finding books they enjoy:

Children are likely to disengage if they have not yet found books that spark their interest. If they consider a book boring, they are not going to want to read it, and may do whatever they can to avoid reading

time.



“Reading is like a superpower. It lets you go anywhere, meet anyone, and do anything!”

-Unknown



Not being exposed to a variety of genres:

Some children, especially younger ones, immediately associate reading with fictional storytime. However, not all children enjoy this genre. A child who has a keen interest in dinosaurs, for example, might be captivated by a non-fiction book on the topic. If they have never been exposed to non-fiction, though, they may not realise the kind of reading they could truly enjoy.

Short attention spans:

If a child struggles to focus for more than a few minutes at a time, then attempting to follow the plot of a story becomes a huge challenge. The effort it takes to process all of the information on one page, if you struggle to concentrate, can mean it 'goes in one ear and out the other'. This then leads to a lack of interest, boredom and consequently a reluctance to read altogether.

In summary, reading reluctance can stem from a variety of causes. Understanding the underlying reason behind a child's hesitation to read is important to be able to support them effectively.



"Reading is essential for those who seek to rise above the ordinary."

– Jim Rohn

Parent checklist: Is My Child Reluctant or Struggling?



As a parent, it is important to identify whether your child is truly struggling with reading, or simply reluctant. Here is a quick checklist to help you understand where they might be on their reading journey.

Is your child able to decode basic words easily?	YES they can sound out most words with ease	NO they often get stuck on common words and seem frustrated when reading
Can your child maintain focus when reading?	YES they sit still and engage with the story for a reasonable amount of time	NO they frequently wander off or get distracted after a few minutes
Does your child express enjoyment when reading?	YES they often ask to read or seem excited when its reading time	NO they complain, avoid reading, or say they don't like books
Is your child unconcerned about how their reading compares to others?	YES they are confident and not worried about how they compare to peers	NO they seem anxious or upset about keeping up with classmates
Has your child found a book or series they enjoy?	YES they have one or more books they're eager to read	NO they often express frustration about not finding the 'right' book
Is your child exposed o a variety of reading material (e.g. comics, non-fiction, stories)	YES they have access to different types of books and reading materials	NO they mostly stick to one type of book (e.g. picture books, or just fiction)

If your child's answers always lean more towards the 'No' side, it may be a sign that they are struggling with multiple aspects of reading, rather than simply resisting it because of one or two aspects.



"Reading is the basic springboard for learning.
And books provide the liftoff."

-Mary Pope Osborne



If you are concerned about your child's reading, use the following questions to help you navigate a conversation with your child's teacher.

1. Understanding Progress

How is my child doing compared to age-level expectations?

Are there specific areas where they struggle (e.g., decoding, comprehension, fluency)?

2. Supporting at Home

What can I do at home to reinforce what is being taught in school?

Are there any reading strategies or activities you recommend?

3. Choosing Books

Which types of books suit my child's current reading level?

Are there any series or titles you recommend for engagement?

4. Extra Support

Does my child benefit from guided reading sessions or extra help?

Who should I contact if I notice persistent difficulties?

5. Encouraging Motivation

Are there ways to encourage reading enjoyment rather than just accuracy?

How can we celebrate progress at home and school?

Tip

Take notes during the meeting and follow up with small, achievable steps at home. Regular communication keeps reading support consistent and positive.



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7. The next steps...



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So you've identified that your child is a reluctant reader. What next?



Don't panic! Although your child may be a reluctant reader now, it does not mean they will be a reluctant reader forever. There are plenty of strategies that can be used to foster a love of reading. With patience, encouragement and the right approach, their confidence in reading can be built up and they can begin to discover the joy that books can bring.

If the signs lean towards a genuine struggle with reading (such as a possible learning difficulty), rather than a reluctance to read, see the next pages on what steps you can take to seek support from your child's school.



"Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body."

– Joseph Addison



Sometimes, despite our best efforts, children can continue to struggle with reading. It is important to recognise when extra support might be needed.

Signs to watch out for include:



Difficulty decoding words or recognising familiar ones.



Avoidance of reading altogether despite using various support strategies.



Slow progress despite regular practice.



Signs of frustration, anxiety or low confidence.



Possible underlying issues such as dyslexia, vision problems or auditory processing difficulties.



“The only thing that you absolutely have to know, is the location of the library.”

– Albert Einstein

9. When to seek extra support



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If you notice a combination of these signs, the first step is usually to have a chat with your child's class teacher. They will be able to provide some insight into their reading performance and progress.

You might also consider contacting the SENDCo (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinator) at your school, or a literacy specialist for further assessment and tailored support, but your child's class teacher will be able to advise if they feel this is necessary. (See the parent teacher conversation resource for tips on how to navigate this).

It's equally important to reassure your child. Emphasise that everyone learns differently and that reading is a personal journey. Encourage them to compete against themselves, not their peers. For example, instead of focusing on who is on which book band in their class, highlight their own progress. "You read three pages more than yesterday - that's fantastic!"

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