
**Teaching Reading to children with
Down Syndrome (3-11 years)**



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Children with Down syndrome will make best progress with reading when they are taught to read whole words. This equips them *with* a sight vocabulary which will help to teach word meanings and build speech, language and literacy skills. Accompanying new words with visual images is particularly helpful for children with Down syndrome, who are good visual learners.

How to Teach Reading

Matching words to pictures will enable children to demonstrate that they can read with understanding, particularly as some of the successful readers will not yet be able to say the words, although they may sign some of them. Photograph toys, objects, people and activities that are important in children's daily routines to make individual materials.

The Match, Select and Naming Method

Matching, selecting and naming are important steps in early word learning:

- Children will be able to match written words before being able to select them
- Children will be able to select written words before being able to say them
- Children learn to read words faster if words are NOT attached to pictures
- Word to picture games tests understanding and so should be a separate comprehension activity

Begin with picture matching and when the child can match and select pictures proceed to word matching (word to word without the picture) and finally to matching the word to the picture.

Recommended order for matching:

- Picture to picture
- Word to word (matching, naming and selecting)
- Word to picture (comprehension game, adds interest, demonstrates reading ability and understanding)

Matching

- Make 2 identical flashcards for each of 4 words.
- Put one word in front of your child; give the duplicate word to the child and say, "This says (cup/shoe...). Put it with the one that is the same." Demonstrate.
- Guide the child to complete the task successfully, e.g. physically guide his or her hands, prompt and praise.
- Match a photo to the word, or turn a word card over to show the corresponding picture, to aid understanding that the written word means the same as the spoken word illustrated by the photo.

Making Matching Fun

Matching games can include:

lotto

fishing (using magnets attached to rod & word cards)

posting boxes

find the word in the room or on the picture (for younger children)

snap

Some children can remember words by being shown them and told them, especially as reading skills develop, and do not need to match all new words in this structured way.

Selecting: learning to associate the name with the word

- Use flashcards that the child has learned to match; lay 2 or 3 in front of the child and say, "Give me (or show me) the word (cup/shoe...)"
- Guide the child through the correct response; when he or she can select 2 words, add a third - slowly build up the number of words to choose from.

Naming

- Children may name words using signs or spoken words.
- Articulation problems may mean that spoken words are not clear. Praise and encourage approximations to word reading as practice helps children to make their speech clearer.
- Show the child the word and say, "What is this? It's a (cup/shoe...) Can you say cup?"

Building & Reading Sentences

- Introduce simple phrases and sentences that you want your child to generate in speech as early as possible during your teaching activities, for example, "Look at Mummy/Daddy/Granny", "Mummy/Daddy/the cat/is sleeping/eating/washing", "A cup/bed/shoe".
- Remember to use the small words of speech, e.g., "the", "at", "in", "is", "his/her" and "she/he" in sentences. (These are the closed class grammar or function words that the children find difficult to master)

- Make simple books with short sentences, using the child's sight vocabulary.
- Make books (photo album or scrap book) with words and pictures. Use these to teach words in categories, for example, the rooms of a house, animal words, garden words, transport words and action words (verbs). Use the children's interests as a guide.
- Repeat words (or whole sentences) after they have signed or said them, to help pronunciation.
- Use errorless techniques by prompting children with the correct answer, until they can say the word, without hesitation.

Further support

Our School Liaison Service can provide further advice and support. Contact us by emailing: info@upsanddowns.net