

PARENT-TO-PARENT

by Rebecca Clingman, Column Editor

This column is written especially for parents of children who have learning disabilities, such as dyslexia. It addresses the challenges, as well as the joys they and their children experience in dealing with schools, family life, peer relations, college and career choices, etc. We hope this column will answer your questions in easy-to-understand language with down-to-earth suggestions, advice and support. From time to time, guest editors will be invited to write articles based on their expertise.

Every child reading



We invite our readers to write to us about specific topics you would like to have addressed. Please e-mail suggestions, questions and comments to Diane Nies at dnies@interdys.org. We are also interested in knowing if you find this column helpful.

—Thank you.

HOW DO I KNOW IF MY CHILD IS MAKING PROGRESS IN READING?

Sandie Barrie Blackley, MA/CCC

In this column I suggest some practical ways for parents to monitor their child's language literacy growth using observations they can make at home. Tutors, teachers, principals, speech-language pathologists, physicians and other helping professionals (HPs) come and go in a child's life, but parents are forever. Usually, parents (or sometimes surrogates, such as grandparents) are the most important adults in a child's life. But, most parents of dyslexic children find it difficult to understand the nature and implications of their child's dyslexia and even harder to monitor the growth of their child's literacy skills over the years. Recent decades have seen major scientific advancements in the understanding and treatment of dyslexia, but there have not been commensurate gains in empowering parents to make use of these advances (Levinson, 2005). Recent trends in public education, such as 'end-of-grade testing' (EOGs), 'adequate yearly progress' (AYP), and 'response to intervention' (RtI) have added a layer of complexity for most parents.

Beginning with the end in mind, I like to ask parents about their goals for their child. Most say that they want their child 'to love reading,' 'to be a reader,' and 'to go to college.' Such responses suggest that parents' goals typically go far beyond the goals of the typical public school (passing the EOGs, making AYP, high school graduation). Naturally, schools have a more short-term, micro view of student goals than do parents. To track the child's language-literacy growth, parents need to combine observations from home with information from the schools—and other HPs (i.e., reading teacher, psychologist, speech-language pathologist). When making home observations, it is common for parents to need the advice and support of the child's HPs. Persistence is generally required, but the effort is usually worth it.

Following are some suggestions for using home observations to track your child's language-literacy growth.

WHAT to measure	WHY it is important?	WHEN, WHERE & HOW to measure IT
<p>The number of minutes your child spends each day in <i>out-of-school reading</i></p> <p>COUNT: 1) Minutes that the child spends being read to and the time he/she spends reading alone or reading aloud</p> <p>2) All types of text (even comic books!)</p> <p>DON'T COUNT: If media (T.V., DVD, radio, computer, etc.) is playing 'in the background.'</p>	<p>The daily volume of reading (including being read to) is both a major cause as well as an effect of language-literacy and cognitive growth. (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1998);</p> <p>It is important to turn off electronic media and reduce background noise because these can disrupt attention and comprehension. The child may be unconsciously attending more to the media than to the reading. Establish home rules limiting the electronic media that compete with reading (T.V., radio, i-Pods, etc.).</p> <p>Over the months and years, and as the student's literacy skills advance, there should be slow, steady growth in the volume of time spent in out-of-school reading.</p>	<p>Just before going to bed each evening, write on a calendar or chart your <i>estimate</i> of the number of minutes your child spent in out-of-school reading that day.</p> <p>At the end of each month add up the minutes for all the days and divide by the number of days to get an average number of minutes per day for that month. Keep this tally month-to-month.</p>

continued on page 54

PARENT-TO-PARENT

continued from page 53

WHAT to measure	WHY it is important?	WHEN, WHERE & HOW to measure IT
Your child's attitude toward reading	People generally avoid difficult and unpleasant activities. To become a daily habit, reading must be rewarding and pleasant.	Make daily notes on a calendar or chart about your child's mood and attitude while reading. If he/she seems consistently unhappy, inattentive and/or under stress when reading, seek guidance from your H.P.
The percentage of words your child reads correctly on the first try	To read text independently students need to read at least 97% of the words accurately on the first try. If accuracy is 93% or less the child is likely to be frustrated. Of course, text samples vary a lot in their readability. You might want to compare your child's reading accuracy when reading grade level curricular materials and class assignments, such as text books, materials used in reading therapy, and/or text from books that you and your child are reading for fun. If his/her percentage of accurate words is in the frustration range (93% and below) see the advice of your HP.	Listen to your child read aloud for one minute. Keep a hash mark tally of 'trouble words' on a piece of scrap paper (all words that he/she didn't read correctly on the first try, within about 1 second, or needed your help with). When a minute is up draw a line after the last word your child read. Count all the words in the passage. Using your tally, subtract the number of 'trouble words' from this total to get the number of correct words read. Divide the number of correct words read by the number of total words to get a percentage of correct words.
The number of correct words the child reads in one minute (CW/M)	Students who read very slowly, even if they read fairly accurately, have a hard time comprehending meaning from the text. For a more detailed explanation of this procedure, see Shaywitz (2003), pp. 276-280	From the information you collected above, you have the number of correct words your child read in one minute (CW/M). Approximate expected reading rates are as follows (for the end of each grade): 1st grade: 40-60 CW/M 2nd grade: 80-100 CW/M 3rd grade: 100-120 CW/M 4th grade & above: 120-180 CW/M

References

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