

School Begins Now -- Is Your Young Child Reading-Ready?

By Carole Richards

The eager eyes of young children enter school each fall. They want to learn, and they want to learn to read. However, a significant number of our children struggle learning this fundamental skill critical to academic success. If you cannot read, you cannot spell, write a sentence, use math, read instructions, read science, social studies, literature or virtually any subject in school.

Eager kindergarten and first graders slowly become the “unmotivated” or disinterested learners as they progress through school if they cannot read. Millions of students never master the skill of reading and cannot read well, or at all, which tremendously affects their lives as students and later as adults.

So as a parent, how do you know if your child is a struggling reader? Even if your child has many of these early warning signs, which are not conclusive by themselves, review these **Early Warning Signs:**

- Unusual pencil grip,
- Difficulty rhyming words
- Classifying objects
- Following directions
- Poor fine motor problems (printing, cutting, coloring)
- Understanding “like” and “difference”
- Poor verbal language
- Gross motor skills
- Restlessness/difficulty sitting still

In addition, the following indicators can help identify your child’s reading struggles early-on. Catching reading difficulties early is important to keeping a children happy and motivated before they begin to fail.

Sight Word Reading

Most schools provide a list of required grade level sight words. While this is not really teaching reading, if your children struggle learning their sight word list, learning to read may become a challenge.

Learning Letter Names and Letter Sounds

Does your child know letter names? Do your children know both the upper and lower case letters? Even more important, do your children know the sounds of the letters? Knowing letter sounds is critical to reading success.

Sounding Out Simple Words

Can your child combine three letters (consonant—short vowel—consonant) to read a word, for example, “b – a – t” is bat? This difficult skill is also critical in the reading process. Many children can learn the letter sounds but struggle connecting sounds to form words.

Does Your Child Enjoy School?

Does your child complain of headaches, stomach aches, or just doesn't like school, this is a huge red flag! Most young children love: school, being with other children and learning. While learning to read may not be the cause of school frustration, it is important to identify the cause.

Myth: Your Child Will Outgrow It

Many parents tell me their teacher says, “Your child will outgrow reading struggles.” My experience suggests that usually a struggling first grader becomes a struggling fourth grader unless appropriate steps are taken.

My Child Likes Me to Read to Her

My first grader loves to have stories read to her. However, she fusses when I ask her to read to me. If your little ones always enjoyed books and being read to, pay attention if she does not want to read to you at all, or reading out loud is extraordinarily difficult for her.

Learning to read should be an exciting time for any young child. If it isn't, take steps to figure out why and provide the needed interventions.

Next month I will identify ways to help a struggling young reader.

Carole Richards is president of North Coast Tutoring Services, president/director of the Academic Fun & Fitness Camp at Lakeland Community College, author of RICHARDS READ Systematic Language. She is a frequent guest on radio and TV. She can be reached at caroler@northcoasted.com .