



## Independent Reading

By: Louise Spear-Swerling

Suggestions for fostering independent reading include: (a) Give children books that are not too difficult. (b) Help them find books they will enjoy. (c) Encourage them to try many kinds of material. Although independent reading cannot substitute for teaching decoding, it improves reading comprehension and the habit of reading.

Independent reading is children's reading of text - such as books, magazines, and newspapers - on their own, with minimal to no assistance from adults. It can consist of reading done in or out of school, including purely voluntary reading for enjoyment or assigned reading for homework. There are strong associations between independent reading and reading achievement, and many researchers believe that independent reading plays a key role in the development of reading fluency (speed and ease of reading), vocabulary, background knowledge, and even spelling. Not surprisingly, motivation also is associated with independent reading; children who are interested in and motivated to read tend to do more independent reading. Unfortunately, children with learning disabilities in reading often do not read independently, because they tend to find reading effortful, may have trouble obtaining books at their reading level, or may have generally negative attitudes toward reading as a consequence of repeated failure.

The National Reading Panel concluded that more research was needed to show the effectiveness of independent reading programs commonly employed in schools, such as Sustained Silent Reading. (In these programs, students may spend a substantial block of time reading books of their own choice silently, with the teacher also reading silently at the same time.) In addition, the panel cautioned that these programs do not appear effective for students who lack basic word decoding skills, especially as a sole or primary treatment. These cautions are especially relevant to youngsters with LD, who tend to have problems with word decoding.

Independent reading is never a substitute for focused remediation and interaction with a teacher in key skill areas, such as word decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Nevertheless, encouraging independent reading for pleasure in

youngsters with LD is important for developing habits of reading, interest in reading, and practice of learned skills. Here are a few suggestions for parents and teachers interested in fostering independent reading in students with learning disabilities:

### Suggestions for fostering independent reading

- Help children find books that they will enjoy, such as books on topics that interest them, different book series, books by a favorite author, and so on. School and public librarians can be valuable resources for information about books on different topics and about various book series.
- Make sure the book is not too difficult. Poor readers will often pick a book that is too hard to "save face." However, even young children can understand the concept that optimal learning and enjoyment occur when something is at the right level of difficulty. Children should be able to read at least 95% of the words in a text accurately, or the book is too difficult for independent reading. If a particular book is of interest but just too hard for the child to read right now, read the book to him or her instead, and look for something easier for the child's own reading.
- Over time, encourage children to explore a variety of types of text, such as nonfiction books, fiction books, magazines and newspapers, poetry, etc., as well as different topics.
- Seek out a range of reading materials from educational publishers that may enable low-achieving readers to read independently, including decodable books, leveled books, high-interest readers, and the like. Young poor readers will often respond enthusiastically to books they can read successfully, even books that may seem stilted or uninteresting to adults. Adolescent struggling readers usually resist books that appear "babyish" or different, but if the student's reading level is at least second to third grade, there are some very good options for reading material (such as high-interest material written specifically for struggling older readers) that is relatively easy but still age-appropriate.

### Sources

#### **Peer-reviewed journal articles**

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## Other helpful sources

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Other helpful links

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