



Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders OAFCCD

Reading to Learn

Once children with language disorders learn to read they may also struggle with *reading to learn*. In the senior elementary and high school grades, students are expected to listen and read to learn. Both of these skills will be hard for a student who has a language disorder. The student is expected to comprehend abstract concepts, make inferences, interpret what is heard or read, problem solve and ask questions.

As the learning expectations increase, students with language disorders may have difficulty with understanding and completing assignments, with tests and exams, and with following the course content. As a result the student may stop paying attention, act out in the classroom and receive failing marks. The student is at high risk for failure and for eventually dropping out of school.

The language content of the curriculum will become more difficult for the student. New vocabulary, including specialized vocabulary for science and math, will constantly be introduced. The sentence structure will become more complex and students will be exposed to words with double meanings and figurative language. Students need to learn how to decode sentences and make sense of the text.

Parents continue to have an important role in helping children read to learn. Parents should continue to read aloud to children, even after they can read. Reading a novel to a child will provide practice in listening and you can stop frequently to make sure the child understood the content. When a new word or idea is introduced you can stop to discuss it with the child. Encourage the child to guess the meaning of the word from the context. At the end of each reading session, you can discuss the story plot and try to predict what will happen next.

Phonological awareness (the explicit understanding of a word's sound structure) is critical for effective decoding of printed words and the recognition of sound-letter connections necessary for competent spelling. Parents should continue with phonological awareness activities using age-appropriate materials. Older children may not want to repeat nursery rhymes, but they need to identify words which sound the same or rhyme. Pattern books for older children are available. Ask the Teacher or Librarian for books to use at home.

Parents can also help children to learn new vocabulary for each new topic or subject. Ask the Teacher for a list of important new vocabulary. Help your child to learn how the words are pronounced and what they mean. If necessary, make a small drawing or visual image to help the child master the new words. When you aren't sure about a word look it up in a dictionary together. The dictionary will provide information on pronunciation and meaning. Students will learn how helpful a dictionary can be and will be encouraged to use it again when they have difficulty with new words.

Another way to help your child is to develop a visual map of the story plot, characters, historical chronology or science content. With the child's help make small drawings to depict key events or characters. The drawings can be put in sequence to help the child understand the events and remind

them about key information. The drawings don't have to be complicated (little stick figures are fine) but the visual images will help the child to remember the plot or events. They can later be used to help study for a test or exam. For many students with language problems the visual cues can be very helpful.

Students with language impairments often have difficulty with figurative language. Parents report that their child does not have a sense of humour and is unaware when a word has a double meaning. Children need to be provided this information explicitly. Whenever you use a figure of speech or a word with more than one meaning, stop and talk about it with your child. Provide explanations when you think they have missed the point. Studies have shown that we constantly use figures of speech and it is important to make sure students have the opportunity to learn as many as possible. Talk to your child about idiom (local terms or words that are unique to the situation) and metaphor (words or phrases that represent something else).

Students who have difficulty with language can become frustrated and give up on school in the higher grades. Parent support continues to be very important in helping children to be successful at school.

Some of these ideas and strategies have been taken from the "Think Literacy Success, Grades 7-12, The Report of the Expert Panel on Students at Risk in Ontario," released in October 2003.

Source: Professor Genese Warr-Leeper, University of Western Ontario, May 2004