



# ONTARIO ASSOCIATION FOR FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH COMMUNICATION DISORDERS

## O.A.F.C.C.D. NEWSLETTER

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### *Parents as Partners*

The Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders (OAFCCD), in partnership with other community agencies, has developed a program to help parents with the transition from preschool services to school.

The program, *Parents As Partners*, has been established in Oxford County and York Region with funding from the Government of Ontario through the Early Years Challenge Fund.

*Parent As Partners* has been developed to help parents of young children with special needs to develop effective partnerships with schools. Parents are the experts on their child and have an important role to play in making sure children get the services and supports they need to learn and success at school.

To be effective partners with school staff parents need information about their child's strengths and needs, and about the school system and special education. In addition, parents need to develop partnership skills including effective communication and negotiation skills.

The *Parents As Partners* program uses a workshop approach to help parents participate successfully in the transition to school process. Parents attend a series of five workshops that present information on the steps from preschool services to the formal identification of a student as exceptional and the development of the Individual Education Plan.

Workshops are designed to be fun and interactive with speakers from the school board and local agencies. Workshop activities help parents organize the information about their child and develop the skills they will need to be effective partners.

OAFCCD would like to expand the *Parents As Partners* project across the province and is currently seeking funding and partnerships in other communities. Please call Provincial Co-ordinator, Alison Morse at (519)842-9506 if you would like more information on the program.

### **Tips for Effective Communication with School Staff**

1. Keep well organized, accurate records at home. Include school records, important medical data, copies of letters written by you to the school and copies of correspondence and/or reports from other professionals.
2. Take notes at meetings or while talking with school personnel over the phone. Get names, titles, dates, and a brief summary of what was said and by whom.
3. Follow up telephone calls with a short summary letter. Example: "It is my understanding from our telephone conversation of (date) that points 1, 2 and 3 will happen, *etc.* Keep a copy for your files.
4. Be specific in your requests and responses. Rather than "My child isn't learning." develop statements such as "My child cannot read at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade level."
5. Be realistic about your expectations and requests. Demanding is not negotiating. Come to the meeting with alternatives and options.
6. Attend all meetings and conferences dealing with your child's educational needs. Bring your spouse, especially when a major decision is to be made.
7. If you are emotional or feel frustrated with the school personnel, bring someone with you for support and guidance. This person may also speak for you.
8. Remember, it is important to be positive and commend professionals when progress is made. Sharing this good news with the supervisor is recommended, too.

## *Libraries For All*

The Augmentative Communication Service (ACS) at the Thames Valley Children's Centre has recently worked with the London Public Library to improve access to library services for children and adults with communication difficulties. As a result of the *Libraries for All* project, libraries in London have been provided with communication boards for patrons who cannot talk, or who have difficulty being understood.

Each Communication Boards contains messages related to a library visit. There are four boards available, including:

- two alphabet boards
- a word board
- a symbol board

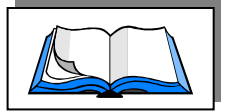
The communication boards are stored at the library's help or circulation desk. These boards can be requested by presenting a *Libraries for All* bookmark or by pointing to one of the *Libraries for All* signs. All London Public Library staff are trained on how to use the boards and how to communicate with people who use Augmentative and Alternative Communication(AAC).

Copies of the four different Communication Boards are available on the London Library Website in pdf.format. A copy of the Alphabet Board, for patrons who can spell by pointing to letters is provided below. The London Library website at: [www.londonpubliclibrary.ca](http://www.londonpubliclibrary.ca) also includes Qwerty Board, for patrons who can spell by pointing to letters in a keyboard format, Word Board, with commonly used words and phrases about library services, and, Picture Board, with concepts presented in a picture form. This is a great project that has increased awareness of the daily challenges faced by children with communication disorders and provided useful tools that can help children participate in the community.

If you have questions about *Libraries for All*, please contact Speech-Language Pathologists, Tracy Sheppard or Stacy McDougall at the Thames Valley Children's Centre by phone at (519)685-8680 or the website at [www.tvcc.on.ca](http://www.tvcc.on.ca)

# HELPING YOUR CHILD WITH READING COMPREHENSION

By Joanne Shimotakahara, SLP, Toronto District School Board



This article is based on the Reading Comprehension section (pages 97-100) of the Ministry of Education's document for teachers called, *Education for All, The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy Instruction for Students with Special Education Needs, Kindergarten to Grade 6* available at [www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/speced/panel/index.html](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/speced/panel/index.html).

## What is reading comprehension?

Reading comprehension is the essence of reading. While learning to decode words in print is an important early skill in reading, decoding alone does not ensure that your child understands the meaning of the words and sentences. For example, you may learn to decode a foreign language to sing a song, but not understand the meaning of the words that you can sing.

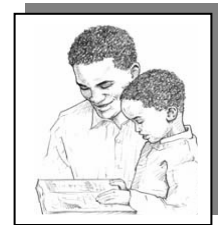
## Which weaknesses are linked to reading comprehension problems?

- Poor oral language comprehension and limited vocabulary
- Weak decoding ability
- Limited higher-order problem solving and thinking skills
- Lack of background knowledge of the topic

## Where should the focus be in helping children with reading comprehension?

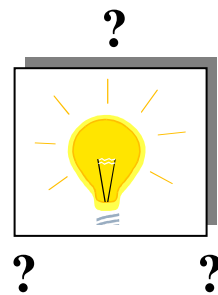
### 1. Vocabulary and concepts in oral language:

- Help your child learn new words related to topics, themes and concepts of the classroom curriculum
- Use stories as natural hubs from which vocabulary can be developed. If you know the stories and topics of the curriculum, you can create key word cards and discuss them before, during and after the material is taught in class.
- Work with your child on a vocabulary scrapbook with an organized chart, web of related words or concept map as visual and memory aids.



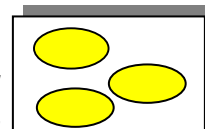
### 2. Comprehension of written text:

- Help your child grasp the meaning of words at the sentence and paragraph level (*e.g.*, pronoun references like “he” and “they”)
- Demonstrate a problem solving approach to linking facts, earlier events and the feelings that motivate characters
- Encourage your child to think about the meaning of printed text, draw conclusions, relate events, predict, and imagine. Your child needs to become a “meaning detective.”



The following is an example of a grade 4 story with ideas for you to help your child understand the meaning of the story. These strategies focus on reading comprehension rather than decoding or phonological awareness.

## The Golden Eggs



There was once a poor farmer. All he had was a white goose, but one fine day he found an egg made of gold in the goose’s nest. The next day the farmer found another golden egg in the nest. “What a fine goose!” he said. “I can sell these golden eggs!” Every morning the farmer found a fine golden egg in the nest. Every day he sold the golden egg. Little by little he was getting rich. But the farmer was in a hurry. He wanted to be rich right away.

One day he said to himself, “My goose lays only one egg a day, but perhaps she has many more golden eggs inside her!” He couldn’t stop thinking about it. At last he said one morning, “I shall look and see!” So the farmer killed the poor goose, but when he looked inside the bird, there was no gold there at all. The inside of the goose looked just like the inside of any goose. “Dear, Oh, dear!” said the farmer. “Why was I in such a hurry? Now I shall be poor again! I have killed the goose that laid the golden eggs!”

<b>Education for All Strategies</b>	<b>How Parents Can Help at Home</b>
<b>Prior Knowledge</b>	<p>Before reading the story, ensure that your child understands key words: <i>farmer, goose, golden egg, nest, rich, hurry</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You could say: “Remember when we went to the farm? What animals did we see? Yes, we saw cows and down by the pond, we saw a .....yes, we saw a <i>goose!</i>”</li> <li>• Help your child relate words like <i>rich</i> and <i>hurry</i> to previous experience. Linking words with their opposites builds associations and helps with memory. You could say: “Remember when we gave some cans of food at school to help <i>poor</i> people? They didn’t have enough money for food. They were not <i>rich</i>, they were ....<i>poor</i>. Do you know someone who is always in a <i>hurry</i>? Yes, I’m often in a hurry. I need to take my time and be <i>patient</i>.”</li> </ul>
<b>Retell, reflect, relate</b>	<p>Have your child read a few sentences and then stop to retell what happened. Ask basic questions (e.g., Who? Where? What?) to assist, if needed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who is the main person in this story?</li> <li>• Where is this story taking place?</li> <li>• What did the farmer find one day?</li> <li>• What did the farmer find the next day?</li> </ul> <p>Then have your child reflect about what happened by asking thinking questions (e.g., How? Why?).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why was the farmer happy about the eggs?</li> <li>• How did the golden eggs help the farmer?</li> <li>• Why did the farmer decide to kill the goose?</li> </ul>

<b>Education for All Strategies</b>	<b>How Parents Can Help at Home</b>
<b>Retell, reflect, relate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why was the farmer sad at the end?</li> </ul> <p>Have your child link what was read to previous information and guess what could happen next. At the end of the first paragraph, talk about the last sentence, <i>“He wanted to be rich right away.”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why did the farmer want to be rich right away? If needed, ask <i>“Was the farmer rich or poor? Have your child reread the first sentence, “There was once a poor farmer.”</i></li> <li>• Before having your child read the second paragraph, model thinking aloud skills and encourage your child to predict and think ahead: <i>“So the farmer wants to be rich right away. I wonder what he will do. Maybe he will buy another goose. What do you think?”</i></li> <li>• Model thinking about the character’s feelings which affect motivation and help your child understand the outcome of the story. At the end, you could comment: <i>“I wonder how the farmer felt at the end after he killed the goose and found no more golden eggs. What else could the farmer have done?”</i></li> </ul>
<b>Pronoun referencing</b>	<p>Ask questions to ensure that your child links pronouns with the correct person or event in the story.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Little by little he was getting rich.”</i> Who was getting rich?</li> <li>• <i>“He couldn’t stop thinking about it.”</i> Who couldn’t stop thinking about it? What couldn’t the farmer stop thinking about?</li> </ul>
<b>Recognizing text structure</b>	<p>Help your child recognize different types of writing. For example, <i>The Golden Eggs</i> is a story with the following components: setting, characters, events, problem, resolution.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You could contrast this story with a short newspaper article (i.e., expository/explanatory) or an advertisement about eggs.</li> <li>• Talk about the difference between the story and the newspaper article about eggs (e.g., what happens to the farmer versus information about eggs and different types of chickens).</li> </ul>
<b>Summarizing main ideas</b>	<p>After your child has read and discussed the story with you, model how to summarize the gist of the story in a few key points.</p> <p><i>This story was about:</i>  <i>The main problem was that:</i>  <i>At the end, the farmer was sorry because:</i></p> <p>It is important to encourage your child to focus on the most important ideas of the story and to “get to the point.” Your child could keep a scrapbook or journal with the title of the story and a few sentences to summarize the main ideas. You could encourage your child to draw a favourite element from the story. This journal would be helpful for reviewing stories, that your child has read, a few days or a week later.</p>

<b><i>Education for All Strategies</i></b>	<b>How Parents Can Help at Home</b>
<b><i>Mental imagery</i></b>	<p>Help your child make a mental representation or model of the story and events. English texts are direct and straightforward going from point to point. Other cultures use a variety of text structures. Encourage your child to understand the story by building a visual structure in steps.</p> <div data-bbox="571 407 862 470" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"><b>Setting:</b> The farm</div> <div data-bbox="571 489 1084 552" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"><b>Character:</b> The farmer, poor, greedy</div> <div data-bbox="571 562 1255 653" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"><b>Events:</b> The farmer finds a golden egg every day. He sells the eggs and begins to make money.</div> <div data-bbox="571 663 1240 756" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"><b>Problem:</b> The farmer wants to make money in a hurry. How can he get more golden eggs faster?</div> <div data-bbox="571 766 1240 869" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"><b>Ending:</b> The farmer kills the goose to see if there are more golden eggs inside her.</div> <div data-bbox="571 879 1317 982" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"><b>Reactions:</b> The farmer is sorry because there are no more golden eggs. What should the farmer have done?</div>
<b><i>Monitoring comprehension</i></b>	<p>You can help your child self-question to check comprehension of what has been read. Competent readers constantly check that they have understood and will stop reading when something does not make sense. Help your child with questions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is this story about?</li> <li>• What part doesn't make sense?</li> <li>• What should I do? <i>Go back and reread the story. Talk through the story using the story structure map. Ask questions: Who? What? Where? What happened? Why?</i></li> <li>• Can I retell the main ideas to someone else?</li> </ul>

Consult with your child's classroom teacher and speech-language pathologist about the resources and strategies that are appropriate for your child. It is important to ensure that the strategies you are using at home, to help your child with reading comprehension, are consistent with those being used in the classroom. The school staff can also provide information on the curriculum and upcoming themes and activities.

For more information and ideas on how to help your child develop literacy and numeracy skills look at the *Education for All, The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy Instruction for Students with Special Education Needs, Kindergarten to Grade 6* on the Ministry of Education Website at [www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/speced/panel/index.html](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/speced/panel/index.html).