

Help Your CHILD

by Karen Truncellito, M.S.

Your child is nearing the end of first grade. Throughout the year, you've watched him struggling with reading. You've consulted his teacher, who had told you that sometimes the problem is maturational; eventually, she says, he will catch on. "But," you ask yourself, "What if he doesn't catch on? How will he cope with increasingly-harder material? Will his self-esteem suffer?" You wonder if your concerns are valid and if there is anything that you can do.

These parental concerns are extremely valid. Being a good reader is a foundation for being a successful student. More often than not, a student's reading problem is not maturational. Often a student needs an alternative method because of learning difficulties or an individual learning style. If that alternative is not provided, the student can fall further and further behind, and his self-esteem will inevitably be affected.

On the bright side, parents can make all the difference in the world. Many parents wrongfully assume that if they are not "qualified professionals," they cannot teach their children to read. In fact, any parent who knows how to read can teach reading. To successfully accomplish the task, examine what methods are or are not working for the child and investigate alternative methods.

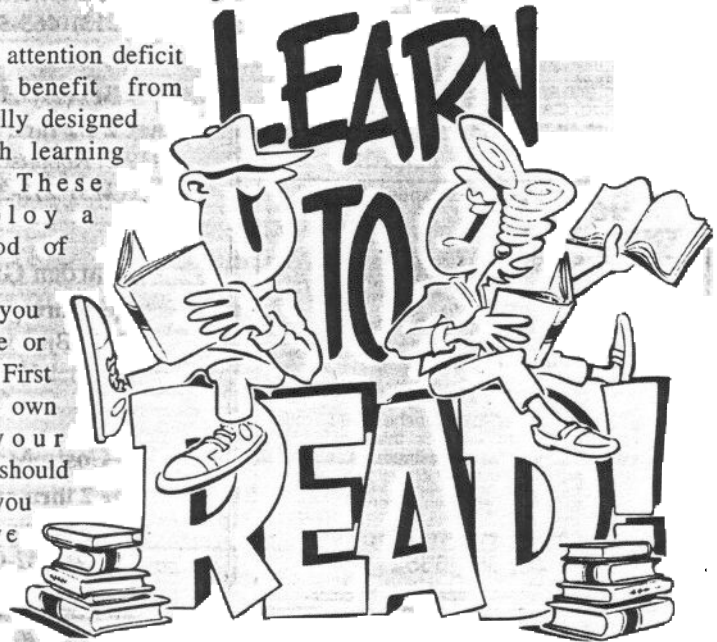
For example, a child who has not experienced success with the whole language method may need to be taught phonetically. Whole language, which involves the memorization of thousands of words, is difficult to impossible for children with memory problems. Teaching a child a "phonetic code" which he can apply to all words may solve the reading problem. Children

with dyslexia and attention deficit disorder might benefit from methods specifically designed for students with learning disabilities. These programs employ a simplified method of word attack.

But how can you know what to use or where to get help? First of all, trust your own instincts. While your first resource should be the teacher, you should not give up if you disagree with a teacher's evaluation of your child's difficulties. Schools sometimes do not have the manpower to diagnose and work on the individual difficulties of all the students who could use extra help. But teachers can possibly provide information on what alternatives you can try at home. They

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may also be able to direct you to diagnostic testing either within or outside the school system. Sometimes teachers are aware of outside sources of help such as local tutors who can seek out and try those other reading approaches. An additional resource is



the National Right to Read Foundation (540-349-1614). Call the Foundation to obtain a list of reading books or programs that have been proven successful with children of all ages and learning difficulties. You can contact the companies individually (many have toll-free numbers) and ask specific questions, gather information or order materials.

No reading program is an instant cure for problems. You will need to be patient, persistent and work constantly with the child for a minimum of 20 minutes a day, three or more times a week. Within a few weeks, you should see visible signs of progress and enjoy the rewards of your labor. Don't give up until your child has mastered reading. If one method doesn't work, another will. Every child can read! ■

Karen Truncellito, M.S. is the author of *Easy Steps to Reading*, a program that utilizes a phonetic code and a simplistic, two-step approach specifically designed for children with mild to severe learning difficulties. To order, call (800) 285-3017.