

What can I do to help my child understand what is read – both when we are reading together and when my child reads independently?

Question 16 from Helping Your Child Become a Reader
(Scanlon, Anderson, Barnes, Morse, & Yurkewecz-Stellato, 2024¹)

Obviously, talking about the things that are read will help children understand the texts. However, there are other things, that don't even involve texts, that can help to support children's comprehension. Two of the most important things are described below.

Talk with children - a lot. Reading is a language skill and spoken language is the foundation. Research shows that children's ability to understand what they read in middle and high school is related to the number of words in their spoken vocabulary in the early grades.

Reading to children often and talking about what is read will certainly help to increase their vocabulary and language skills. However, conversations that occur throughout the day are also extremely important. Be thoughtful about the words you use when speaking with children. Using some more sophisticated vocabulary in day-to-day conversations will help to build children's vocabulary.

For example, you might use words like "scrumptious" and "feast" when talking about a meal, or words like "exhausted" and "fatigued" at bedtime. Children learn the words they hear the most often, so sprinkle some more sophisticated words into your conversations.



Help children learn about the world. As children move through the grades, they are expected to read and learn about things that go beyond their day-to-day experiences. The more they know about the world, the easier it will be for them to understand and enjoy the wide variety of texts they will encounter.

While reading aloud to children is a great way to build knowledge and language skills, there are other ways to do so as well. Watching educational videos on television (such as nature and history channels) and visiting educational websites (such as www.nationalgeographic.com/kids, www.Kidsclick.com, and PBS KIDS), and taking trips to museums and local places of interest will help children learn more about the world. Of course, children will benefit most from such activities when you do them – and talk about them – together.



¹ The complete 23 question booklet can be accessed at: eltep.org/isa-parent-booklet
All individual questions and the complete booklet can be shared for non-commercial purposes.