

PARENTING

The material in this section, based firmly on the theories of Alfred Adler and his many "disciples", has been found to give parents and teachers, practical, direct, concise, commonsense strategies. Adler made a very significant contribution to both teacher and parent education.

A wide range of excellent material is readily available to give guidance to parents and relevant professionals in the management of children and adolescents.

Despite this, parents in particular, feel overwhelmed and intimidated by much of the material. In my private practice, most parents wisely express the desire to have their particular family composition and dynamics and their current management strategies, fully understood before they consider changing their approach.

Topics included in this section are as follows-

Some Basic Management Principles

Some General Guidelines in Managing Children's Behaviour

Some Adlerian Principles

A Classroom Approach-Assertive Discipline (Canter and Canter) Checklists

Child and Adolescent Behaviour Rating Scale

Helping your child learn to read

Helping your child learn to spell

SOME BASIC MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Parenting is a very challenging and demanding occupation. It can also be very rewarding and it can be fun.

All families are unique hence it is wise to understand that widely accepted generalisations (for instance, behavioural characteristics of children depending on their birth-order) might not apply in all cases.

Most parents use commonsense approaches, relying on natural inclinations and impulses. Frequently, however, such so called "normal" techniques do not work.

Parents need to be very observant child watchers. Only through the gathering of specific details, eg., diaries of events, can accurate, useful information be shared with a professional.

Changing a child's behaviour takes **TIME**.

Changing a child's behaviour also takes **PATIENCE, PERSISTENCE** and **CONSISTENCY, CONSISTENCY, CONSISTENCY**.

SOME GENERAL GUIDELINES IN MANAGING CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOUR

In a two parent household, both parents **MUST** agree on the behaviour(s) they wish to eliminate/modify and the strategies they want to implement. Any other adult caring for the child should be aware of these strategies and know how to use them.

Parent(s) need to keep a diary of events (dot points will do) of problems, when they occurred, how they responded and the outcomes. This is essential when seeking help from a professional as explicit details help determine the problem(s) and possible "remedies".

The critical factor in modifying/changing a child's/adolescent's behaviour is **CONSISTENCY** of effort, especially if two parents are involved. Just one lapse can lead to the child's confusion and result in more persistent, inappropriate behaviour.

Establish a priority list of the major, inappropriate behaviours and focus on only one or two of them at a time. Too often parents attempt an impossible mission-working on several transgressions at once.

When new strategies are first introduced, an increase in the inappropriate or targeted behaviour may increase. The child is likely to be confused and uncertain and may test your limits. Again, consistency of strategy is **ESSENTIAL** to establish the new regime.

It is equally important to recognise and reward appropriate behaviour as it is to correct inappropriate behaviour. Only focussing on the inappropriate behaviour can lead to the child's further discouragement and a sense of hopelessness.

Don't expect change to occur overnight or even within the first two weeks of intervention. Inappropriate behaviours that have developed over a long period of time will require consistent intervention over time to change.

Changing a child's inappropriate behaviour will require considerable time, effort and energy. However, a parent is likely to be investing considerable time and energy already in trying to change behaviours using "unsuccessful" strategies.

Gaining the child's full, undivided attention is an imperative first step in communication and behaviour change. For toddlers, this is best done in a quiet spot where parent and child can talk, eye-to-eye, without interruptions. Messages delivered on the run are

ineffective. Be very deliberate about communications, select a quiet location, get down to the child's level, make eye contact and talk firmly and briefly. Having the child repeat the request/message is important. For older children, the family meeting is the best place to talk about inappropriate behaviour and discuss proposed consequences.

Reward charts are very helpful. They act as a constant reminder of requests, display the record of "rewards" and provide permanent, tangible feedback to the child. At first, a day can be divided up in to say, two hourly intervals, with stickers (happy faces and sad faces) indicating appropriate or inappropriate behaviour. Sad faces can be covered by happy faces when the targeted, appropriate behaviour occurs. This tends to minimize **discouragement** and maximize **encouragement**.

Time-out can be a successful way of handling misbehaviour and encouraging appropriate behaviour. It is essential that the procedure is fully understood by the child before it is implemented. Details such as location (place/room), duration, desired behaviour whilst withdrawn, etc. must be discussed. The child must be told the reason for the time-out and how such withdrawal can be avoided. Remember, the chosen place should not act as a pleasant experience (e.g., watching TV, playing games) but as an unpleasant experience, one to be avoided.

Consequences, both natural and logical, are considered more appropriate and effective than punishment. (See attached information below for more details, especially the very important distinctions between consequences and punishment).

Punishing a child- smacking or yelling- rarely has any lasting impact on their inappropriate behaviour. Unfortunately, it frequently results in undesirable emotional consequences. Punishment is usually an expression of a parent's frustration and it often leads to a negative parent-child relationship.

Enjoy time with your child. Shared activities can provide very positive, natural opportunities for communication, fun, laughter, closeness and togetherness.

SOME ADLERIAN GUIDELINES IN MANAGING CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

The writings of Alfred Adler and his “disciples” have had a major impact on parenting in Australia.

Dr. Maurice Balson was a pioneer in the field of Adlerian Psychology and its contributions to teaching and parenting in Australia. While at Monash University, Dr. Balson promoted the work of Adler and one of his major followers, Rudolf Dreikurs through lectures, workshops and seminars.

Dr. Balson was also a very popular and outstanding presenter at meetings for teachers, other professionals and especially parents. His books, which can be purchased through ACER, continue to be highly sought after and greatly valued.

The widely acclaimed programs-PET (*Parent Effectiveness Training*) Gordon (1970) and the STEP (*Systematic Training for Effective Parenting*) method and material, written by Dinkmeyer and McKay (1982, 1990), draw heavily on the work of Dreikurs and his associates.

More recently, the contributions of Steve Biddulph and Michael Grose provide popular and helpful advice for parents.

Some important aspects of Adlerian Psychology are presented below.

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF ADLERIAN PSYCHOLOGY

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS UNDERLYING BEHAVIOUR

- all behaviour has social meaning
- belonging to a group is the basic need
- all behaviour is purposeful
- people are essentially active decision makers
- an individual develops a "life style" which results from evaluation of self and one's place in society- the life style is considered to become established by about five years of age as the child develops accurate or "biased apperception" and so adjusts perception to fit with the "private logic" or "personal bias"
- feelings of inferiority underpin all disturbed behaviour

VALUES UNDERLYING DEMOCRATIC (AS OPPOSED TO AUTOCRATIC) RELATIONSHIPS

- social equality
- co-operation
- shared responsibility
- self discipline
- mutual respect

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DEVELOPMENT OF LIFE STYLES

Intrinsic Factor

- the child's heredity stress is on what child decides to do with inherited abilities, temperament or disabilities)

External Factors

- family atmosphere and values
- family constellation
- methods of training

FAULTY LIFE STYLES

These develop as a result of inappropriate training methods (lack of order, spoiling, overprotection, rejection, competition, sibling rivalry, mistake-centred approaches, perfectionism, over-ambitiousness and **DISCOURAGEMENT**) and can lead to:

- diminished social interest
- feelings of inferiority
- withdrawal or self elevation

TEN BASIC PRINCIPLES OF BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT

1. USE ENCOURAGEMENT

- Build upon strengths and assets
- Emphasise the activity or the task not the outcome, result or level of achievement
- Mistakes are inevitable and not important

2. AVOID DISCOURAGEMENT

- Avoid a mistake-centred approach
- Avoid conditional acceptance
- Minimise sibling competition/rivalry

3. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CONSEQUENCES AND PUNISHMENT

- Natural and logical consequences are obviously related to the "transgression"
- The child/adolescent can understand consequences, they usually seem reasonable
- Possible consequences should be explained before the misbehaviour or transgression occurs
- Punishment is not linked to the misbehaviour in any logical way
- Punishment has proven to be ineffective in changing behaviour
- Punishment results in negative emotional outcomes
- Punishment negatively affects interpersonal relationships

4. NEED FOR CONSISTENCY

- Essential that responses to misbehaviour are consistent over time
- Essential that responses to misbehaviour by all responsible adults are consistent

5. CHANGING BEHAVIOUR TAKES TIME

- Changing undesirable or inappropriate behaviour usually takes considerable time

6. LISTEN TO WHAT IS BEING SAID BY CHILD OR ADOLESCENT

- Important information is gained by listening carefully to comments or explanations

7. AVOID THE FIRST IMPULSE TO RESPOND

- Count to 10 before responding to misbehaviour
- Try to determine the purpose of misbehaviour
- Think carefully before responding to provocation

8. AVOID POWER STRUGGLES

- Don't engage in power struggles-nobody emerges a winner
- Inappropriate comments are made or acts committed in the heat of an argument
- Inappropriate messages are given during power struggles

9. MAKE REQUESTS REASONABLE

- Ensure that the requested behaviour change is attainable

10. USE OF GROUP OR FAMILY MEETING

- Enlist the group to decide appropriate behaviour
- Use the group to determine appropriate consequences for misbehaviour
- Use the group to acknowledge and reward appropriate behaviour

GOALS OF MISBEHAVIOUR

The basic aim is to find a place in, and belong to, the group.

Misbehaviour results from the belief that this is the best way for the individual to function in the group.

Four goals of misbehaviour are:

1. Attention getting
2. Power
3. Revenge
4. Displaying inadequacy

HOW TO RECOGNISE THESE GOALS

- through your own feelings and reactions to an individual's misbehaviour
- through the individual's response to attempts of correction

SOME USEFUL ADLERIAN TECHNIQUES

FOR INDIVIDUALS

- fallacy of the first impulse
- encouragement
- natural and logical consequences
- positive communication

FOR FAMILY GROUPS

- family cohesion
- democratic practices
- family councils
- conflict resolution

FOR CLASSROOM GROUPS

- group structure and cohesion
- democratic practices
- group discussion
- conflict resolution
- sociometry

WHAT TO DO IF THINGS GO WRONG!

ASK YOURSELF

Is this behaviour really undesirable or am I concerned unnecessarily?

IF YOU DECIDE THAT IT IS UNDESIRABLE BEHAVIOUR THEN-

1. Identify the purpose, the goal of the child's misbehaviour.
2. Extricate yourself from rewarding the goal.
3. Be firm. Don't give in to provocations.
4. Look for ways of meeting the positive needs of the child
 - attention and love
 - a special place in the family or class

- to be a capable and responsible member of that group
5. Give the child encouragement

Enjoy your time with children and adolescents. They can be fun!

NATURAL AND LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES: A METHOD OF DISCIPLINE THAT DEVELOPS RESPONSIBILITY

The usual way of disciplining children is to reward them when they obey and punish them when they disobey. The reward-and-punish method, which is the disciplinary system in which many parents of today were raised, has certain disadvantages:

- It makes parents responsible for their children's behaviour.
- It prevents children from learning to make their own decisions and consequently from adopting rules for effective behaviour.
- It suggests that acceptable behaviour is expected only in the presence of authority figures.
- It invites resistance by attempting to force children to conform.

There is an alternative to reward-and-punishment. It is called natural and logical consequences (Dreikurs and Grey, 1970).

This method has certain advantages over reward-and-punishment:

Firstly, it holds children, not parents, responsible for the children's behaviour.

Secondly, it allows children to make their own decisions about what course(s) of action are appropriate.

Thirdly, it permits children to learn from the (impersonal) natural or social order of events, rather than forcing them to comply with the wishes of other persons. For example-the child who refuses to eat goes hungry; the child who insists on not getting dressed on time will be late for school. These are two examples of natural consequences. In situations devoid of natural consequences, or in instances of potential danger to a child (e.g., playing with a sharp knife, placing scissors in a power point), logical consequences can substitute.

Logical consequences permit a child to learn from the reality of the social order. That is, they learn about mutual rights and mutual respect. The social order includes all those people who have significant contact with the child, including relatives, neighbours,

teachers, etc. These adults assist parents by actually sharing the task of disciplining the child by imposing generally accepted societal standards. Hence, the parents are not seen from the child's perspective as being the only "strict", "bossy" guiding adults.

For consequences to be effective, the child must see them as logically related to their misbehaviour. In other words, the consequences must "fit" the behaviour in a logical way. This demonstrates the power and importance of the family meeting. In such a forum, the child is informed calmly, plainly and concisely of the consequence(s) of any misbehaviour and is led to see the direct, logical link between transgression and consequence.

PUNISHMENT, NATURAL AND LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES

Reward and punishment deny children the opportunity to make their **own** decisions and to be responsible for their own behaviour.

Punishment may lead to a few temporary "victories". But it usually results in the loss of a positive relationship and destroys the possibility of co-operation.

Natural and logical consequences require children to be **responsible** for their own behaviour.

Natural consequences are those which permit the children to learn from the **natural order** of the physical world-for example, not eating is followed by hunger, jumping from a height will hurt, touching a flame will burn.

Natural consequences require no arrangement by parents. Most situations are devoid of natural consequences and many can be too dangerous for the child to experience.

Logical consequences are those which permit children to learn from the reality of the **social order**-for example, children who do not get up on time may be late to school and have to catch-up on their work.

For consequences to be effective, the children involved must see them as being **logical**.

The designing of appropriate logical consequences take **time, imagination and creativity**. They rarely can be devised on the run. They should be thought through very carefully then discussed during a family meeting before they are implemented.

Anger, warnings, threats and reminders can turn a consequence into a punishment.

Remember that a child has a choice of actions with logical consequences. They can choose to pursue the un-co-operative/useless pathway or they can choose the useful/co-operative pathway. They make the choice knowing in advance (as explained at the family meeting) the consequences of their decision. If misbehaviour occurs, the child is giving a clear message that they are determined to misbehave and ignore their parents'

request(s). To change behaviour takes TIME .and PATIENCE so the need for parental persistence. More **TIME** may be needed for the desired outcome to be achieved.

The purpose of using natural and logical consequences is to motivate the children to make **responsible decisions**, not to force their submission. Consequences are effective only if parents avoid having hidden motives of winning and controlling.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PUNISHMENT AND LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

Punishment expresses the power of personal authority.

Logical consequences express the impersonal reality of the social order.

Punishment is rarely related to misbehaviour.

Logical consequences are logically related to misbehaviour.

Punishment tells the child that he or she is bad.

Logical consequences imply no element of moral judgement.

Punishment focuses on what is past.

Logical consequences are concerned with present or future behaviour.

Punishment is associated with threat, either open or concealed.

Logical consequences are based on goodwill, not on retaliation.

Punishment demands obedience.

Logical consequences permit choice.

Some practical examples of these differences.

Punishment expresses the power of the personal authority.

For example:

Father: "Susan, hurry up and finish your dinner. We are sick and tired of you pushing your cold food around the plate".

In contrast, logical consequences express the reality of the social order. Logical consequences acknowledge mutual rights and mutual respect.

For example:

Father: "Susan, if you don't finish your dinner in a reasonable time, your meal will be removed and you can leave the table so that we can enjoy our meal in peace".

Punishment is arbitrary or barely related to the logic of the situation.

For example:

Mother: "Peter, I've told you a thousand times to put your soiled clothes in the washing basket. I had to collect your clothes this morning and put them in the basket ready for washing, so you are grounded this Saturday night".

In contrast, a logical consequence is related to the misbehaviour.

For example:

Mother: "Peter, I'm going to do the washing this morning. If your soiled clothes are not placed in the washing basket on time, you will be wearing dirty clothes to school this week".

Punishment is personalised and implies moral judgement.

For example:

Father: "Tom, you took my backpack without permission. Don't you know that is like stealing? You know stealing is wrong! Now it is lost. Your pocket money is stopped until the backpack is paid for".

Logical consequences are impersonal; they imply no element of personal moral judgement.

For example:

Father: "Tom, how are you going to replace the backpack?"

Punishment is concerned with past behaviour.

For example:

Amy promised to be home by 11 o'clock but did not show until 1 o'clock.

Mother: "Amy! It's well past 11 o'clock. You're always late! How many times have we gone through this? You never seem to care. You can't be trusted. You can just stay in at night for a fortnight and you can forget about having that party we talked about".

Logical consequences are concerned with the present and future behaviour.

For example:

Mother: (Next time Amy asks to go out) "I'm sorry, but you're not ready to take responsibility for coming home on time. We'll try again next week".

Punishment threatens the "offender" with disrespect or loss of love; it is a put-down.

For example:

Mother has told Sam that he could have fun playing with the dog if he would take responsibility for feeding it.

Mother: (Moralistically) "Sam you did not feed your dog today so you can't take him to the park to play. Maybe this will teach you the value of being responsible with you dog".

When logical consequences are involved, the parent's voice is friendly and implies goodwill.

For example:

Sam: Mum, I want to play with my dog at the park".

Mother: (matter-of-factly) "No, Sam, you haven't taken time to feed him today. We'll try again next week".

Punishment demands obedience.

For example:

Susan and Betty are disturbing the meal by kicking each other under the table.

Father: "You two stop it right now or you'll go to bed without dinner".

Logical consequences permit choice.

For example:

Father: "You may settle down or leave the table until you're ready to join us".

Steps to be taken in applying logical consequences:

Appropriate logical consequences must be designed, explained and accepted during the family meeting before they are implemented when required.

Provide choices and accept the child's opinions. Use a friendly tone of voice that communicates your goodwill.

As you follow through with a consequence, assure the child that they may try again later.

If the misbehaviour is repeated, extend the time that must elapse before the child tries again.

Be patient, it will take **time** for natural and logical consequences to be effective.

SOME ADDITIONAL PARENTING TIPS

Try to view misbehaviour calmly and objectively rather than reacting to it with anger or rage and regarding it as a personal affront. Overreaction can encourage the child to persist, because of the excessive attention.

To change a child's behaviour will require the parent(s) to change their behaviour.

Be both firm and kind. Firmness refers to your follow-through behaviour. Kindness refers to the manner in which you present the choice.

Talk less; act more.

When parents do things for children they can do for themselves, they are robbing them of self-respect and responsibility.

Avoid fights; they indicate lack of respect for the other person. Do not give in; that indicates lack of respect for yourself.

Parents never "win" a power struggle with their child. Don't engage in them.

Discouragement is the basis for most failures.

One of the major roles of a parent is to give encouragement.

Encouragement is the process of focusing on an individual's resources in order to build self-esteem.

Methods of encouragement

- Showing faith
- Building self-respect
- Recognizing effort and improvement
- Focusing on strengths and assets

Determine who owns the problem.

Try to avoid arguing.

Refuse to fight and give in.

Encourage independence.

Try to increase your consistency.

Refrain from overprotection.

Don't try to be a "good" parent, try to be a "responsible" parent.

Efficiency of withdrawal; leave the scene if a conflict arises- take your "sail" out of the child's "wind". Withdrawal is still perhaps the best answer if no other approach to changing the child's intent seems readily available.

Beware the fallacy of the first impulse-count to ten (use the time for thinking)- before responding; it minimizes inappropriate comments or actions.

Develop firmness without domination.

Finally, try using humour, it can be a great strategy!

Sources:

Dinkmeyer, D. and McKay, G. (1982). *The Parent's Handbook. STEP. Systematic Training for Effective Parenting*. American Guidance Service.

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Dreikurs, R. (1953). *Fundamentals of Adlerian Psychology*. Alfred Adler Institute.

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ASSERTIVE DISCIPLINE

(POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT FOR TODAY'S CLASSROOM)

L. CANTER AND M. CANTER (1997)

This material has become popular in schools and because it has important implications for parents, it is included in this section.

THE FOCUS - Positive behaviour management for teachers.

ORIENTATION - Behaviour modification principles.

GOALS -

To teach teachers the skills needed to become an assertive, empowered teacher.

To teach students to choose responsible behaviour and in so doing raise their self-esteem and increase their academic success.

ASSUMPTIONS

TEACHERS

Teachers today do not receive the respect from parents and society they used to receive.

More students come to school with behaviour problems than ever before.

Teachers are not sufficiently trained to deal with today's behaviour problems.

The myth of the good teacher keeps teachers from asking for assistance.

Good curriculum is not always enough to motivate students to behave.

STUDENTS

Students have the right to a teacher who will set firm and consistent limits.

Students have the right to a teacher who will provide them with consistent positive encouragement to motivate them to behave.

Students have the right to know what behaviours they need to engage in that will enable them to succeed in the classroom.

Students have the right to a teacher who will take the time to teach them how to manage their own behaviour.

PARENTS

Parents play a direct, positive role.

BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION PRINCIPLES USED

RULES

Rules must be clear and observable.

Assertive statements about behaviour.

POSITIVE REINFORCERS

Start strong and gradually decrease its frequency.

Increased frequency needed for difficult students.

Goal is to praise every student every day.

Praise at least two students following a direction.

Needs to earned/rewarded quickly.

Reinforcers

Individual

Verbal praise

- personal
- descriptive
- specific
- age appropriate
- name on board

Classwide

- Marbles in jar (Problem children get more marbles than average)
- Blackboard points
- Food
- Free time
- Night of no homework

NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES

Something a student does not like.

Not psychologically or physically harmful.

A CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE PLAN

A classroom discipline plan consists of three parts-

Rules that students must follow at all times.

Positive recognition that students will receive for following the rules.

Consequences that result when students choose not to follow rules.

ESTABLISHING A DISCIPLINE HIERARCHY

FIRST TIME A STUDENT DISRUPTS

Issue a warning -a powerful reminder.

"Bob, the rule in the classroom is no running. That's a warning."

Student knows that the next disruption will bring with it a real consequence.

SECOND TIME

Teachers provides a consequence.

e.g.,

5 minutes working away from group.

Time-out.

Writing in behaviour log.

THIRD TIME

Teacher provides a consequence.

e.g.,

10 minutes working away from group plus writing in log.

FOURTH TIME

Contact parents.

e.g.,

Phone call or note.

FIFTH TIME

To the principal.

Counselling, conferencing with the parents or suspension.

SEVERE CLAUSE

Remove from classroom without warning and send to principal.

For severe misbehaviour-fighting, vandalism, violent behaviour.

CHILD and ADOLESCENT BEHAVIOUR RATING SCALE

Name: _____

Date of birth: _____ Age: _____ Gender: _____

Siblings/Number: _____ Position in Family: _____

School: _____ Grade: _____

Presenting Problems	Yes	No
Aggressive		
Argumentative		
Temper tantrums		
Naughty		
Overactive		
Sad		
Timid		
Anxious		
Depressed		
Immature		
Confidence problems		
Self-Esteem problems		
A victim of bullying		
Problems relating to parents		
Problems relating to siblings		
Problems making friends		
Problems keeping friends		
Problems learning		
Problems with teachers		
Problems with school mates		
An instigator of bullying		

Interests/Hobbies: _____

Special Abilities/Talents: _____

HELPING YOUR CHILD LEARN TO READ

While there has usually been an interest for some parents to be actively involved in their children's education, this interest has shown a marked increase over the past few years.

During my case-conferences when I explain their son's or daughter's psycho-educational report, parents of young children invariably ask for advice about supporting their child's learning. I remind parents that providing educational assistance to their children is far from easy. Despite the best of intentions, such efforts too often result in frustration and tears-for both parties! Parents need to be reminded that rarely are they born teachers and hence they are best to see their role as being a partner or mentor in their child's learning. In this role, their most valuable contributions are to engage in relevant and enjoyable educational activities and to provide a friendly and encouraging atmosphere.

My message to parents is consistent. "Talk to your child's teacher and see how you can be actively involved in the child's learning". In the majority of cases, the teacher knows the child's learning progress and can give valuable insight into the underdeveloped skills in the struggling student.

For the parents who feel a need to try some special approach, usually offered by private practitioners, be cautious. ALWAYS ask for evidence that the recommended method has been shown to be superior to regular approaches.

So-called "new" or "special" doesn't necessarily mean better. Be advised that there has been a long list of guaranteed "golden methods" of learning to read since at least the 1930s and 40s. Many of the current "new" methods have their origins at this time. Unfortunately, this is not revealed to teachers or parents. No one method has been shown to have general superiority over other methods for all students.

As the following information is for parents, an attempt has been made to provide a brief and concise explanation of the key aspects involved in learning to read. For those parents who would like more details, please consult the **Reading Section** in **Sharing iDE&S** on my website **<http://docsykes.com>**

The following activities are based on established research and theory and can be viewed as being supplementary to most approaches used currently in schools.

As reading is an important aspect of language, some basic points about language development in children are a useful starting point.

The language continuum starts with the child's ability to listen and understand spoken language. Hence, oral language (both heard and spoken) is developing well before a child attends school and begins to formally learn to read. Obviously, an understanding and use of spoken language continues to develop throughout life and play a central role in reading.

When the child starts school, often they are introduced to reading. Reading can be seen as the secondary form of language-that is, written language being superimposed on the already established and developing spoken language.

Early reading involves three fundamental skills.

Phonological Skills

These are the skills involved in hearing, identifying and manipulating speech sounds. These skills are being established from a very early stage of the child's language development. Very natural, informal activities such as listening to spoken language, speaking and hearing and learning nursery rhymes and songs help develop an awareness of speech sounds. While informal, these early, basic skills have been shown to play a very significant role in learning to read and also to spell. Teachers have been increasingly concerned about the development of phonological skills and most will give special attention to these important skills.

Phonic Skills

During the first year at school, students are introduced to phonic skills. Phonic skills involve the association between the already developing or established awareness of the sounds of spoken language with their written language equivalents. More formally stated the letter-sound correspondences. Such skills involve the learning of the alphabet and an understanding of the different sounds the letters of the alphabet and other letter combinations can make. These skills form the basis of reading.

Word Recognition Skills

These involve the ability to identify written words, both in isolation and in context. Several cues are used to identify written words-

1. Word-attack skills-sounding out words using both phonic and phonological skills.
2. Word recognition skills-the instant, visual, whole-word recognition of words.
3. More advanced syntactic (grammar) skills and semantic (understanding) skills to aid the recognition of words in the context of sentences, paragraphs and prose.

Generally speaking, I suggest that parents focus mainly on the Word Recognition Skills through flashcard activities and reading. Teachers are better able to teach the phonological and phonic skills. However, if parents are interested, they may like to help their child develop Phonological Skills which can be established and reinforced through many fun, informal games and activities.

WORD RECOGNITION AND EARLY READING ACTIVITIES

Word Recognition Activities

For parents, an excellent way to establish and reinforce word recognition skills is through flashcard activities and games. Key words are written on small cards and the child learns

these words through their regular exposure. A list of basic words is provided below. For a more extensive range of important basic words, see the **Spelling Section** on this website.

Activities can include the following-

- Flashing (for just a few seconds) the word to the child and having she/he identify the word. This usually is seen as a fun activity as the child tries to read the rapidly flashed word.
- Showing (no time limit) the word and having the child identify the word.
- Playing cards games such as match, snap, same or different. This requires two or more sets of words and two or more players.
- Having a key word placed on the fridge or some other prominent location and treating it as the word for the week.
- More elaborate cards can be made having picture cues or other cues to aid recognition of the word on the front of the card.

These activities can be undertaken in very short sessions, say no more than 10 to 15 minute, several times per week. If the child sees these sessions as being enjoyable they are likely to participate willingly and enthusiastically. It is imperative that the child receives ENCOURAGEMENT and PRAISE for their efforts, not DISCOURAGEMENT and CRITICISM. Hence, negative comments must be avoided

The Dolch Basic Sight Vocabulary of 220 Frequently Used Words

all	do	help	my	seven	use
always	does	her	myself	shall	
am	done	here		she	very
an	don't	him	never	show	
and	down	his	new	sing	walk
any	draw	hold	no	sit	want
are	drink	hot	not	six	warm
around		how	now	sleep	was
as	eat	hurt		small	wash
ask	eight		of	so	we
at	every	I	off	some	well
ate		if	old	soon	went
away	fall	in	on	start	were
	far	into	once	stop	what
be	fast	is	one		when
because	find	it	only	take	where
been	first	its	open	tell	which
before	five		or	ten	white
best	fly	jump	our	thank	who

better	for	just	out	that	why
big	found		over	the	will
black	four	keep	own	their	wish
blue	from	kind		them	with
both	full	know	pick	then	work
bring	funny		play	there	would
brown		laugh	please	these	write
but	gave	let	pretty	they	
buy	get	light	pull	think	yellow
by	give	like	put	this	yes
	go	little		those	you
call	goes	live	ran	three	your
came	going	long	read	to	
can	good	look	red	today	
carry	got		ride	together	
clean	green	made	right	too	
cold	grow	make	round	try	
come		many	run	two	

There is general agreement that students are normally able to read these words by Grade 2 and spell most of them by Grade 3.

Source:

Dolch, E. W. (1955). *Methods in Reading*. Champaign Illinois: The Garrad Publishing Co., (pp. 373-374).

Reading Activities

Learning to read by reading is the basic premise of the following activities. The focus is on the child actually reading words in isolation or in context. Obviously, for the no-reader or struggling reader support is needed to be able to read. There are several ways for parents to provide such support.

Reading Together or Paired Reading Approaches

This approach was the basis of early reading many years ago when grade readers were in vogue. The teacher and children had the same book to read. This enabled the children to read along with the teacher and learn to recognise words by reading. Re-reading and constant practice helped reinforce word recognition. Context was very important both for the use of general language cues including semantic (meaning) and syntactic (grammar) cues but also for establishing and maintaining interest and motivation.

Today, several Reading Together approaches are used with basically the same fundamentals being constant. These approaches are referred to by the following names-

- Choral Reading
- Books on Tape
- The Neurological Impress Method

There are many advantages of these Reading Together approaches. Importantly, it enables children to read before they have mastered the basic phonological and phonic skills: skills, which many young children find very difficult to acquire. Children can also experience successfully learning outcomes-they feel that they can read and hence excellent encouragement and positive reinforcement is provided. Because Reading Together approaches do not require a knowledge of the basic reading skills, parents can readily engage in such activities. Furthermore, the material being read can be selected to be high in interest as the words to be read do not have to be controlled in terms of difficulty. The child is not required to recognise words initially but simply to read along or instantly repeat or copy what the teacher or parent is saying.

In selecting the material to be read by the parent and child, the following are the popular options. It can be something the child has composed and perhaps written down by the parent or teacher- a phrase, a sentence or a short story about a topic of interest, usually to accompany a drawing. Or it can be a selected published book, usually one the child is very keen to read. Some gentle guidance may be needed to ensure that the book is appropriate both in terms of interest and difficulty.

Reading Together Strategies.

I recommend that two copies of the chosen book are procured. This makes the process easy if both parent and child have a book each. It also indicates that the book is important-it is a valued possession.

Firstly, the parent reads the whole story to the child. This may be repeated several times. The story can also be retold by the parent with the child adding her/his comments and interpretations. The rationale is for the child to gain a good understanding of the story including key characters, names, plot etc. This will greatly aid word recognition when the child later comes to read along because she/he will know what to expect.

Secondly, the child is encouraged to read along-say, one page at a time. Again, the story can be discussed. This can be repeated several times. Obviously, the parent needs to be cautious not to bore the child with too much repetition. But the more the child is prepared to repeat the activity, the greater is the likelihood of her/him remembering/recognising the words.

Thirdly, the child can be encouraged to recognise certain words. The parent might ask if the child can "read" a particular word. They should try to select a word that the child is highly likely to know. The parent should point to the target word. If the child is correct, PRAISE the effort enthusiastically "WOW, what a great effort, you can read". If the child is uncertain or incorrect, say "Great try" and quickly give the target word. It is IMPERATIVE that the child is ENCOURAGED and PRAISED not CRITICISED and DISCOURAGED.

This method is very dependent on the child's willingness to have a go. Unless the child is provided with a caring, encouraging, non-competitive environment and feels capable of achieving successful outcomes, she/he will be a most reluctant, unsuccessful and very unhappy participant. Obviously, such a situation must be avoided at all times.

HELPING YOUR CHILD LEARN TO SPELL

Parents typically get involved in their child's spelling activities-usually by "testing" the words set by the teacher as homework to be learned each week.

For those parents who wish to become more involved in the early stages of their child's learning to spell, the following activities are suggested. The words included in the Dolch list above are a most convenient source of basic, commonly used words. Of course, other words can be added to this list if deemed necessary.

A suggested activity to teach basic words

Firstly, it is important to check that the words can be read before expecting them to be spelled.

Mention has been made of a strategy that I have recommended to teachers and parents. As the feedback has been very positive, it would seem worthwhile to provide details on the way basic words and other selected words can be taught.

Once the target word has been identified either through direct assessment or through a search of workbooks to find spelling errors, the word is printed on the front of a flashcard. On the back of the flashcard, the same word is written with the "error", "tricky bit" or "demon" letter(s) in red. For example, using the target word "any"-

Front

any

Back

any

When introducing the word to the child, the teacher/parent places the word on the desk/table before the child and says-

"This word is "any". Look at this word. You found it a "tricky" word to spell. The "tricky" bit is written in red on the back of this card". Parent/teacher turns the card over and shows the child saying-"See the letter "a" is red". This can be repeated for two or three other "tricky" words during the session.

When each word is again placed before the child, (front side up), the teacher/parent asks "Which letter is red"? If the child is correct, turn the card over and reinforce the correct choice with praise- saying "Well done". If the child forgets or chooses the wrong letter, turn the card over and say-"Have a look or check your answer". "Where is the "tricky" bit?" Have the child say the letter then add "Yes, well done". "We will try this word again later to see if you can remember the "tricky" bit".

This activity can be repeated several times during the week. New words can be included while "known" words can be removed from the set. The set of words should not exceed 4 or 5 words at any one time. It is important to reintroduce the "known" words at regular intervals to reinforce correct spelling.

Again it is worth stressing that activities involving parent and child are very dependent on the child's willingness to have a go. Unless the child is provided with a caring, encouraging, non-competitive environment and feels capable of achieving successful outcomes, she/he will be a most reluctant, unsuccessful and very unhappy participant. Obviously, such a situation must be avoided at all times.

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