

Reading – Getting started

Reading is not only an essential life skill but something that goes deeper. Reading with your child forms a bond like no other. A lifelong love of books and reading for pleasure is something to be nurtured and encouraged. It helps to develop not only literacy skills but improved communication ability, imagination, a desire to find out about the world and a thirst for knowledge.

Sitting down to look at a book and talk about the content is something to be encouraged between any parent or teacher and child but when there is also a complex condition such as Rett Syndrome in the equation, this activity assumes even more importance.



As with anyone, reading alongside the person with Rett Syndrome

- Aids understanding
- Teaches the concept of text relating to the spoken word
- Encourages eye tracking from left to right, following the text
- Develops the skill of storytelling through discussion about story content and illustrations

Although the bullet points above may seem daunting, the methodology is really very simple and something that anyone can do with any age.

Sit together and choose a good book.

The book should ideally be chosen by the person with Rett Syndrome. Encourage a selection of age appropriate books rather than always sticking to the same one.

Read!

Just read; out loud. Trace your finger under the words as you read. Point out key words. These could be names or frequently occurring words.

Comment on what you are reading.

If something rhymes, comment on it. Show the rhyming words, comment on which letters or sounds are the same, which are different. If there is an unusual word, point it out.

Written by Abigail Davison-Hoult & Callie Ward on behalf of Rett UK

Web: www.rettuk.org

Tel: 01582 798911

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Make it conversational.

If a character is being mean, or funny, or silly, point it out. Ask the person you are reading to if they agree. By now you will hopefully have established a yes/no response. Don't just read the words, talk about what is happening.

Expand the conversation.

If the book you are reading has illustrations, talk about them. Watch where the person you are reading to is looking on the page. For example, if there is a mention of a bird in the story, there is a strong chance they will look to an illustration to spot the bird. Point out details not necessarily mentioned in the text.

Ask for opinions.

At the end of the book, ask the person if they enjoyed it. Thank them for taking part. Offer your opinion and give a reason.

Don't restrict reading to story time. It is easy to incorporate it into everyday life.

Here are some other ways to encourage reading and literacy:

- Point out words common to that person e.g.; their name, words such as "mummy" or "daddy"
- Point out words on signs, on menus, in leaflets.
- Point out sight words e.g.; "the" - words which cannot be sounded out phonetically.
- If the person you are working with is at the start of their reading journey, encourage looking at letters e.g.; children's programmes which concentrate on letters, have alphabet posters up, sing alphabet songs.
- As you start to increase in confidence and are happy that there is a good understanding of the basics, you could point out more complex groups of letters e.g.; silent letters, "ight" sounds like "ite" or other phonics sounds such as "sh", "ch", "er", "ure".
- Make sure that the subtitles are turned on whenever the television or a film are on. There is a strong suggestion that this makes a valuable contribution to learning to read.

All of these things are exactly the same things you would hope to do for any child learning to read.

The key here, as always, is to PRESUME COMPETENCE.

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Reading – Next steps

Once you are confident reading with the person with Rett Syndrome, it is time to move up a gear.

As described in the **Modelling** section, printed grids can be laminated and used to not only enhance communication but also increase exposure to more language and vocabulary.

- **Whilst reading, have to hand printed grids about reading.**

These may have vocabulary such as “turn page”, “next”, “favourite” amongst other words.

You could also have a printed sheet showing positive views eg; “like”, “funny”, “wow”, “amazing!” and one showing negative views eg; “that stinks”, “scary”, “bad”.



- **As you read, stop at key points in the story.**

For example, when you turn the page use the printed sheet about reading to model - “I” “turn page”.

- **As things happen in the story, stop and ask the person that you are reading with what they think.**

Use their best yes to start the conversation off.

- **Use Partner Assisted Scanning.**

Find out whether they think it is good or bad, and then using your printed sheets with positives and negatives, to find out what they think in more depth.

Don't forget that they may very well think more than one thing so keep offering words and commenting on the responses you receive.

- **As you both gain confidence, expand upon thoughts and opinions.**

You could start to relate what is happening/has happened in the story to another story or something that has occurred in real life.

This is a big step towards the important skill of being able to relate an event to something else, and to be able to retell a story.

Go to the **Partner Assisted Scanning** and **Modelling** sections for more detail on these strategies.

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