

## **Information and advice on working with your child at home:**

**Before you start trying to do any work with your child at home** it is important to help them create a work space where they can concentrate and have all the materials to hand that they may need. Help your child create a homework station that's separated as much as possible from siblings, pets, TVs and other distractions. Encourage them to think about the best way to set up this space and to talk it through with you. Keep in mind that every child has a unique way of accomplishing this task. Children also usually exhibit more "buy in" when they have had a true say in the process.

**Why this will help:** Children with learning and attention issues are easily distracted from their homework by pretty much anything nearby, whether it's a TV show or a paper clip that is shiny and bendable and—well, you get the point. Eliminating distractions and working in a consistently set-up space will help immensely in making homework time more productive. So will having a place to store schoolwork and other organisational aids. If everything is all there in one place—materials, folders, etc.—ready to go each night, your child won't need to spend any time searching. Instead, all your child will need to do is just settle down in familiar surroundings and start working. (Information taken from [www.understood.org](http://www.understood.org))

### **Reading:**

It can sometimes be tricky to get your child to read when it's something they find difficult or frustrating, but reading doesn't have to be just about books. Nearly everything we do involves reading of some kind; so encourage your child to:

- Help you read a recipe, read directions or instructions for a game.
- Watch a program / DVD that interests them and then make a quiz for them about it. The aim is to get them to read the questions / multiple choice answers by themselves; but it will also encourage them to concentrate and use their memory. You could even get them to create a quiz for you - now they need to both read and write!
- Put the subtitles on the TV, most remotes come with a pause button to freeze the screen if it's going too fast.

There are many apps now available to help encourage reading, from those that read a whole book to you; to those that will read text back to you. Audio books are NOT cheating and have their place with struggling readers and accomplished readers alike. They encourage a love of stories and information, enrich vocabulary and give positive examples of reading styles and expression.

Some useful links:

<http://www.naturalreaders.com/download.php> (free screen reader)

<https://www.e2bn.org/cms/online-resources/learning-resources> (fiction & non-fiction audio files)

<http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/> (books)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/genre/childrens> (podcasts)

[https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.google.android.tts&hl=en\\_GB&gl=US](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.google.android.tts&hl=en_GB&gl=US) (text to speech app free)

[www.theschoolrun.com/best-reading-apps-for-kids](http://www.theschoolrun.com/best-reading-apps-for-kids)

[www.callscotland.org.uk/downloads/](http://www.callscotland.org.uk/downloads/) (Apps and extensions to use on both Apple and Android devices to support learners with reading and writing difficulties)

## Spelling:

Many children experience difficulties learning to spell. This may be caused by problems identifying and remembering the phonetic code of letters we use in the English language to spell, working memory difficulties or problems with the visual/verbal processing of words. Wherever the difficulty may lie there are ways that you can support your child and help them to progress. Small successes should be celebrated and even on bad days, you should look for something positive to say rather than focusing on what's gone wrong; however frustrated you both may feel!

### Spelling games (without technology!)

**Full circle:** This can be played with a pen and paper, whiteboard and pen or a set of letters/ letter sounds. Instructions:

1. Provide a set amount of letters/ sounds that can be used to create a premade list of words: Children with spelling difficulties often benefit from using a kinaesthetic or 'hands on' approach so use a set of magnetic or wooden letters if you have them, or create your own using pieces of card or by writing letters on pebbles collected from the beach!
2. Start with a target word that the child can easily read. Take it in turns to change the word by changing one letter or letter sound (sh/ch/th/ng/nk...) to create a new word.  
e.g. '**shop**' "Can you change one sound & turn shop into chop... Can you change one letter and turn chop into chap..."  
shop - chop - chap - chat - hat - hit - hot - shot - shop. (Letters needed: sh/ch/o/a/i/h/p/t)  
<https://montessorisoul.com/product/full-circle-phonics-game-lists/>
3. Each time the letters are changed to make a new word the word should be verbalised saying the new 'sounds' (not letter names) to spell the new word- e.g. "p..i.. t spells pit." This helps to create links between visual & verbal working memory which is often lacking in children with dyslexic traits.

**Word Ladder:** Make it trickier! Instructions:

1. Choose a starting word and also a target end word with a set amount of letters.
2. Aim: See who can get from one word to the other in the least amount of moves.  
**home** - hose- host- post- cost- coat - **chat** (6 moves)
3. Best played by listing the new words underneath the previous word in a ladder style if using pen and paper/ whiteboard and pen as your child will be able to see the difference changing one letter can make.
4. As in Full Circle, each new word should be verbalised saying the new 'sounds' (not letter names) to spell the new word- e.g. "h- o-m (e) spells home" (the 'o' and 'e' make a long single vowel sound).  
[www.papq.com/word-ladders.html](http://www.papq.com/word-ladders.html) - online free version.

Spelling Apps to help your child practise their spellings in a fun way:

- Word Wizard for Kids - Google Play
- [www.spellingshed.com/en-gb/](http://www.spellingshed.com/en-gb/)
- [www.spellingcity.com/hangmouse.html](http://www.spellingcity.com/hangmouse.html)

## Writing:

Writing takes a lot of effort and a combination of skills such as:

- fine motor skills (for writing neatly),
- working memory (remembering what you want to write or copy),
- long term memory (for spellings and background information).

When asked to do a piece of writing, children are often 'full of ideas' but find it difficult to write them all down before they forget, or they find it difficult to know where to go with the one idea they have thought of, how to start writing it down and make sense of it.

Spelling difficulties also make the process even harder as they are trying to remember what it is they want to say and write it down before they forget, but every time there is a word they can't spell this becomes a distraction and another thing to think about at the same time. If there is a difficult spelling in the middle of a sentence that they need to concentrate on, they have two choices:

- 1) Concentrate on getting the spelling right, but then probably forget what they wanted to say for the rest of the sentence, or
- 2) Write the sentence down as quickly as they can so they don't forget, but the spelling will not be to the best of their ability.

The best way to support your child in their writing is to help them break the task into manageable chunks so they feel empowered rather than overwhelmed. Not all children need the same support so here are a few ideas that may help:

### Planning -

- Get your child to write down ideas as they come onto post-it notes or small squares of paper, they can add a quick doodle or picture if it will help them to remember the idea better.
- When they have a few; help them to rearrange them into an order that makes sense for the task.
- Encourage your child to take one idea at a time; in order and concentrate on writing about that bit. If needed you can use each idea as a 'heading' and add further post it notes (maybe use a different colour) as they come up with more information about each section.
- When they have finished, the post-it note(s) can be put on the 'finished' pile and they can move onto the next. As they progress through the ideas one by one they will get a sense of satisfaction as the 'finished' pile grows and the amount of writing they have completed continues to increase.

Alternatively you can help your child to create a 'mind-map' on a piece of paper in a similar manner to above. <https://goodparentingbrighterchildren.com/mind-maps-for-kids>

### Spelling -

- Talk through your child's ideas before they start to write up their task and come up with a list of useful spellings they may need. They can use them when necessary and not waste time getting stressed trying to 'sound them out' whilst in the flow of writing. Having a correct spelling to copy re-enforces the word in their visual memory rather than using an incorrect spelling and that being the image they remember.
- Lists of high frequency words in alphabetical order can be found and downloaded for your child to keep in a folder, enabling them to find them independently. [www.theschoolrun.com/what-are-high-frequency-words](http://www.theschoolrun.com/what-are-high-frequency-words)
- Focus on work content if this is the objective of the session rather than the spelling. Drawing attention to every spelling mistake will only knock your child's confidence and make them less likely to try. Choose one or two words to work on and correct each day and encourage them to try and get them right in subsequent pieces of work too.

## Working Memory:

You may be wondering what all the fuss is about regarding working memory, but it is an integral part of our brain that can have far reaching effects if it's not working properly. The good news is that there are ways to strengthen working memory and it can be a lot of fun doing it!

There are two types of working memory: auditory memory and visual-spatial memory. You can think of these skills in terms of making a video. Auditory memory records what you're hearing while visual-spatial memory captures what you're seeing. But that's where working memory's similarity with making a video ends.

When you make a video, visual and auditory information is stored for safekeeping and can be played back when you need to access it. You don't necessarily need to pay attention to details when you're filming. Working memory, on the other hand, isn't just stored for later use. It has to be accessed and "played back" immediately—even as new information is arriving and needing to be incorporated.

(Sourced from: [www.understood.org](http://www.understood.org))

Children with weak working memory find it difficult to 'hold on' to information already given to them as new information arrives. This means they often only remember part of what they have been told, usually the beginning or the end. Children use their working memory every day:

- Working memory helps kids hold on to information long enough to use it.
- Working memory plays an important role in concentration and in following instructions.
- Weak working memory skills can affect learning in many different subject areas including reading, writing, spelling and maths.

[/en/learning-thinking-differences/child-learning-disabilities/executive-functioning-issues/5-ways-kids-use-working-memory-to-learn](https://www.understood.org/en/learning-thinking-differences/child-learning-disabilities/executive-functioning-issues/5-ways-kids-use-working-memory-to-learn)

**Activities to help:** Often your child will be better at remembering things either in a visual or auditory way. You can strengthen their working memory by using methods that use both senses to support each other.

**Visualisation** - Teaching ways to visualise thoughts can help improve working memory.

Reading:

- As they read, ask your child to imagine the scene and replay what is happening in their mind. Get them to tell you about it so you know they have understood it correctly.
- Allow them to listen to audio books and imagine what is happening, can they retell the story verbally or by drawing/ writing it down?
- If it is a long piece of text that they need to refer back to, get them to break the text into small sections (paragraphs or groups of sentences), and summarise the content in a few words or by doing a quick sketch or doodle. This is a bit like leaving signposts to follow on a journey that you can refer back to quickly when you need to find a particular place or piece of information.

Remembering Instructions:

- When you give your child instructions, ask them to visualise and imagine themselves doing it.
- Leave visual reminders such as post-it notes or leave a check-list for completing an activity.
- Use technology such as phones or tablets to make audio notes and reminders.
- Finding ways to connect information can help your child with long-term memory as well as working memory.
- Play Games: Card games such as Crazy Eights, Uno, Go Fish or Memory Pairs, and other games such as "I went to the shops and bought..." and Kim's Game can help build working memory.