

Does your child find it difficult to read fluently?

Many children who come to us say that when they are reading a comprehension piece, the words jump about on the page. Many others say that the words stay still but they have to read them 4 or 5 times before they can understand what they have read...by which stage they're exhausted and can't face answering the questions. Tears and frustration often follow.

Some children, when they're reading, skip words, skip lines, insert words that aren't on the page, use the picture for cues, rub their eyes and yawn!! And some get stuck on the high frequency words e.g the, got, is, that, what, in, at etc. I'll come back to the high frequency words in a moment!

Why does this happen for children who are otherwise very bright?

It's because their eyes are not working properly together in sync. Their brains are receiving a mixed message from each eye so words on the page do not look to them as they do to us. Even if the words don't move about on the page they still have to look at each word in isolation which turns the reading experience into a nightmare of simply reading a list of words that don't make any sense.

Children have said to me "Seriously, why would anyone want to read"? "What does anyone get out of reading"? They don't experience the enjoyment of a story because they read each word slowly and in a disjointed manner.

The high frequency words - Why do they get stuck on words that they are coming across and trying to read all the time like 'the' etc and yet they can read words like horse or garage?

The answer is that they are brilliant, visual learners. They can picture a horse or a garage so those words are stored but there is no picture for the words ...the, got, at etc. Think about it; you can't imagine a picture for 'got'. Mind blowing!!!

Then we have the problem of why they can read words like 'got' at the top of the page and by the time they get to the bottom of the page they no longer recognise the word 'got'.

You're saying to them, "How do you not know that word, you read it at the top of the page?"

The answer is that their eye muscles tire too quickly when they are reading along a line. This means that the first line comes out quite fluent but as they read down the page, the eye muscles tire, the eyes send a message to the brain to say "I can't do this much longer" and as the connection from the brain to the eyes slows down, the reading speed becomes monotone and slow. Your child literally drains of energy as if someone has taken 3 of their 4 batteries out and they may yawn or rub their eyes, fidget or slump in despair! Of course, if you told them that they could stop reading and go and play a video game, the 3 batteries return very quickly. This makes it look as if they just can't be bothered to read but this is not the case. If a child can read, they will. It takes a lot more brain power to read a book than it does to play a video game.

What can be done to help?

One of the exercises we do in our clinic is eye tracking. We do this while the child is standing on a balance board but you can try it at home with your child standing on the floor.

Ask your child to look at and follow a sweet whilst keeping their head still – hold their chin if necessary.

Hold the sweet approximately 7 inches from their eyes.

Move the sweet up and down 3 times and then left to right 3 times. Slowly and smoothly!

Watch their eyes while they're doing this exercise.

Do they follow the sweet smoothly or are their eyes jumping about, flicking, are they losing sight of the sweet and looking away or are their eyes jumping ahead of it?

If any of the above difficulties are present you can begin to imagine how hard it is to literally focus on the words, track them smoothly and speak them with expression.

If your child finds it hard to focus on the sweet they may have difficulty concentrating. If they have difficulty focusing and tracking a sweet with their eyes they may have difficulty reading, retaining spellings and/or concentrating.

If you would like further information please contact us.