

You Can... Explore reasons for reading difficulties

Is your reluctant reader unwilling to read, or do they have difficulties? By the time they are in Key Stage 2, many children who experience difficulties will try to disguise them – and children have a surprising number of strategies for diverting your attention from the fact that they simply can't read. So if there are reading difficulties, what can you do about them?

Thinking points

- Reaching Key Stage 2 without being able to read well is a cross-curricular disadvantage as reading is at the heart of almost every subject.
- Children of this age are very often reluctant to admit they can't do something – especially something that their peers can do. This puts particular pressure on your relationship with the child because in order for you to do any kind of intervention, the child needs to know that they can trust you. Allowing themselves to be involved in an intervention is a tacit admission that there is a problem. Diagnosing the problem is therefore a very delicate process as you must not imply that the child is failing, while at the same time you need to find out what the child can't do – and why.

Tips, ideas and activities

- Start off by investigating the obvious, using the record form on photocopiable page 56. Establish if there is a vision or hearing problem; even if the child has never complained of either, try getting them checked. Children who have always had a problem with sight or hearing don't know that there is another way for it to be.
- Compare the child's attainment across the curriculum. If it is uniformly low then reading itself is unlikely to be the root cause of the problem. If this is the case you need to consider the child's progress as a whole and plan the route forwards in small, manageable steps.
- Use the photocopiable sheets 'Phonological awareness MOT' on page 57 and 'Behaviours associated with dyslexia' on page 58. If the child has poor phonological processing together with a poor short-term memory, then ask for a dyslexia screen.
- Is there a problem with concentration and attention? Consider other comparable children in the class – and your experience of teaching this age group. Time how long the child is able to focus on a reading task, compared to other tasks in the classroom.
- Does the child have difficulty *comprehending* rather than *decoding*? If a child is not making meaning, it could be that they went through the early stages of a reading scheme too fast, with an emphasis on decoding, and have never acquired the habit of making meaning; or it could be that they are now reading books that are too difficult for them to both decode and make meaning. Either way, try an easier book and see if you can kick-start their comprehension of texts.
- The principles of assessment for learning are particularly important when working to overcome a child's reluctance to read: establish where the child is, and where they want to be and then plan the steps to bridge the gap. Remember the importance of small steps: even when you manage to work out what the sticking point is, the child is not likely to make a miraculous leap forwards.

