Make the Most of Summer for Your Struggling Reader

"Isn't It Vacation?"

Summer is the much-welcomed, much-needed break from school-year demands, especially for the **7-15% of students who have dyslexia** or struggle with learning to read. We get it. We run an elementary-aged summer reading program here at Tufts, and there is no greater pain than having to explain to a child with dyslexia that the skill that presents them with the greatest number of challenges and frustrations is going to be their sole focus for the entire month of July. Yet, the stakes are too high to risk any type of “summer slide” or regression of reading abilities. Students without learning disabilities lose, on average, one month of grade-equivalent skills during the summer (Zvoch & Stevens, 2011). Students with dyslexia often require at least five times the number of exposures of typical students in order to master literacy tasks, and any skill loss can further exacerbate their learning challenges.

Without the burden of additional academic demands, the summer can offer an opportunity to focus almost exclusively on developing (or at least maintaining) reading and writing skills. You don’t have to break the bank to provide your child with good support. On the opposite page are some recommendations we’ve developed at multiple price points. But first, consider:

**Daily Independent Reading for 15 Minutes**: This is one of the best tools you can provide for your struggling reader, and it’s free (with a library card)!

1. Choose books at the right level.
   - Gather information about your child’s Independent Reading Level from their teacher. Levels can either be alphabetic characters (A-W), or numbers like a Lexile (70-980). Local libraries offer resources at every level. We recommend selecting books at your child’s Independent Reading Level and one level above (Instructional Reading Level).

2. Create a positive routine.
   - Find a time that you and your child can consistently devote to reading each day. Choose a comfortable spot, and try to reduce outside stressors like buzzing phones. Let your child pick the books that are most interesting to them.

3. Focus on learning, not perfection.
   - Correcting every mispronounced word can dampen your child’s motivation to read. Instead, ask your child to tell you two things they learned, provide an alternate ending for the story, or identify what the text has made them wonder about.
$75 OR LESS

**Audio Books:** The Independent Reading Level of children with dyslexia is often far below their intellectual level, so this is where audio books and parent read-alouds can be powerful tools for building interest and content knowledge. Companies like Bookshare and Learning Ally provide low-cost, sometimes free, audio books to U.S. students and often have summer reading/incentive programs.

**Literacy Apps:** There are tons of literacy apps that vary widely in scope and quality, but in general, literacy apps are particularly good for practicing spelling. Here is a great list of apps for individuals with dyslexia that was developed by the International Dyslexia Association: https://dyslexiaida.org/ipad-apps-for-literacy-instruction/

$200 OR LESS

**Authentic Writing Opportunities:** If your child is tired of worksheets or blanches at the notion of writing a postcard, seek out opportunities that are authentic to their goals and interests. Writing does not always have to be in a formal paragraph form to count as practice. Writing can support dramatic play, like creating menus or scripts for a motion capture film. It can also be for practice purposes, like signs for a garage sale or lemonade stand. Some students are inspired to write letters to favorite famous and non-famous people, complete a Mad Libs, or create a comic strip. To build writing skills in a systematic way, one of our favorite resources is Diana Hanbury King’s workbook *Writing Skills.*

$500 OR MORE

**Self-Guided Programs:** Skill-building centers like Kumon are located around the country, and though they are not designed for specialized literacy instruction, they can offer structured 2x/week opportunities for self-paced skill reinforcement, particularly for children who do not have a severe form of dyslexia.

**Specialized Instruction:** Meeting several times per week with a tutor who has specialized training for teaching children with dyslexia is perhaps the best way to receive targeted instruction. There are several questions that can help ensure a good fit: 1) ask your tutor to describe his/her training, 2) ask about his/her style and experience teaching children, and finally, 3) ask how s/he will ensure the instruction is targeted to your child’s profile and how s/he plans to monitor progress.

Many tutors are trained in explicit phonics instruction, and that can be the right approach for struggling readers, but it is not always the best solution or most comprehensive plan for remediating all weaknesses. Some children need assistance building fluency skills or working on comprehension. Ensuring that your tutor is able to develop a targeted remediation plan based on assessment findings, and will regularly monitor progress in case there is a need to switch instruction, will go a long way towards efficient skill-building.