

Spelling tips for parents

Do you want to help your child improve their spelling? Try some of these ideas with your child at home:

- Using magnetic letters stick the words up on the fridge and ask your child to identify the word. Then mix up each word and ask your child to put the letters back in the correct order
- Write words on post-it notes and stick them around the house
- Make funny sentences with the word in
- Make crosswords with the words on your child's spelling list
- Take turns! Test your child on one of their words, then allow them to choose a word out of the dictionary for you to spell
- Let your child practice on a little white board with a marker pen. Children like the novelty of writing on the white board, and they can rub it out and try again
- Practice at the breakfast table. Your child will feel they're not being deprived from what they want to do in their spare time after school
- Play Hangman with the words on your child's spelling list

Helping your child with spelling

English spelling can be confusing. There are 44 sounds (phonemes) in the English language but only 26 letters to represent these sounds.

Words don't always look as they sound or sound as they look. For example, 'rough' and 'bough' look as if they should rhyme but are pronounced differently. So it is important that children learn the sounds of words and are able to break up words into separate sounds.

Early phonics work concentrates on this. It's also important that children develop a visual memory for words to enable them to judge if a word 'looks right'.

To spell well, a child needs to:

- Be able to break a word into its separate sounds
- Know which letters represent the sounds
- Recall tricky words
- Know when to use the appropriate word (e.g. 'meet' or 'meat')
- Look for links between words according to meaning (e.g. 'warrior' and 'war')

Individualised lists

Many schools send home weekly spelling lists. Children frequently do well in the weekly test but then fail to remember the words a week later and don't transfer the knowledge into their writing. This can be because the words don't link to the child's spelling needs.

A more useful approach now used by many schools is to create spelling journals. The children 'collect' a personalised list of words they frequently spell incorrectly. They need to learn these words and are encouraged to find ways of remembering them - there are lots of different strategies they can use.

How can parents help?

Identify words your child often spells incorrectly. Use the 'look, say, cover, write, check' approach to practise these words with them.

So your child looks at the word to try to remember the visual pattern. They then say the word. Next they cover the word and write it from memory. Finally, they check to see if they've got the word right.

This method is very good at encouraging children to look carefully at words and to begin to look at word patterns.

Play the matching game Pelmanism:

- Write the words onto cards – two cards for each word
- Spread the cards out
- Take it in turns to turn over the cards to find the matching pair

Helping with tricky words

Some words in the English language are very difficult to spell. It can be helpful to develop a 'story' for these words, particularly those we meet frequently.