

*When faced  
with learning  
26 letters,  
44 sounds, and  
170 letter  
combinations,  
children find  
spelling  
challenging.*

## Helping Children Who Struggle With Spelling

During early literacy development a child learns that there is a relationship between speech and print. When a child enters school, they learn how to correctly symbolize sounds to represent letters. Spelling is a skill that requires children to correctly represent spoken language in print.

Spelling is complicated and a source of great frustration for children who struggle to memorize weekly spelling lists and put pen to paper to express ideas that may be hindered by limited spelling vocabulary.

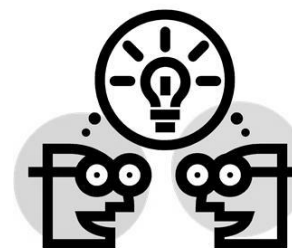
A parent can help their child navigate the complexity of learning to spell. Remember to use what your child knows to apply strategies that will help him or her to remember words. We know that memorizing a word without understanding why that word is spelled a certain way is not an effective approach.

### Spelling activities to try at home with your child

#### Finger tapping and spelling

You say a word. Your child repeats the word and says the word again, sound-by-sound slowly tapping index finger to thumb, middle finger to thumb, etc. to represent each sound heard. You ask your child how many sounds they heard in the word.

Your child gives an answer. Then ask how many letters made those sounds. There may be a diagraph, two letters that make one sound, such as sh, ch, or th, or one letter that makes two sounds as in x (ks). Your child then spells the word letter by letter. Finger tapping is a multisensory way to stimulate your child's memory.



#### Mapping on graph paper

You say a word. Your child repeats the word and graphs the sound by moving a bingo chip or penny into a centimeter box on graph paper. Your child then repeats the sound and moves the chip down, replacing the chip with the actual letter(s) by writing in the box until the word is completed.



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### **Fernald method**

Your child watches as you say a word while writing it in crayon. You repeat the word while running your finger underneath the word. You model word tracing by saying the word and tracing the word using one or two fingers, saying each letter of the word traced. You say the word again while running your finger underneath the word. Have your child practice tracing the word until he or she can write the word from memory. Remind your child to say each part of the word as he or she traces it.

Next, have your child write the word from memory. Let your child decide when to remove the model and write the word from memory. Make sure he or she says the word while writing it. If at any point there is an error, stop your child immediately, cover the error, and model the tracing procedure again before proceeding. Once the word has been written correctly three times without the model, put the word in a word bank alphabetically. Provide practice with the word on a later date.

### **Five step study strategy**

Help your child to:

- Say the word.
- Write the word while saying the word.
- Check the correctness of the word.
- Trace the word and say it.
- Write the word from memory and check it.

### **Syllable approach**

Present syllables on flash cards. Have your child look at the syllable and pronounce it. After practicing with separate syllables, move them together to form words. You pronounce the word in syllables. Your child pronounces the word in syllables then writes the word in syllables. This can be put on a spelling grid with columns by writing each syllable in a column and finally the whole word in the final column.

### **Analogy strategy**

If your child is having difficulty with a word, develop a word bank of similar words to practice. Develop word banks with like patterns to provide practice and build spelling vocabulary. Make associations with rhyming words and discuss what letters are spelled the same as the model word. Practice by spelling orally from memory and then writing the words.

For example, if 'should' is difficult to spell, use should, could, and would in the word bank.

### **Self-talk**

Use a four-column grid. Write the word in the first column. Have your child talk about the word and identify what they know about the word. How did they spell the word, in the second column? What will help your child to remember the spelling, in the third column? Finally, rewrite the correct spelling in the fourth column.

### **Enjoy playing with words together**

Look beyond the spelling test. How many words can you build from a single root word? How are words spelled around you? What are the derivations of words on menus, on signs, in the grocery store? What is the derivation of "filet mignon" or "barbeque"?

### **Resources**

#### **Reading Rockets**

A new approach to teaching spelling.

#### **[National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](#)**

The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS) and other institutes of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) support dysgraphia research.

#### **[International Dyslexia Association](#)**

To create a future for all individuals who struggle with dyslexia and other related reading differences so that they may have richer, more robust lives and access to the tools and resources they need.