10 Tips for Teaching a Struggling Learner

There are very specific teaching methods that you can use to help your struggling learner succeed. One of the most important things you will want to do is to use curriculum and teaching strategies that can be customized to meet his needs.

Even if other methods have failed to work for your child, the ten tips that follow will help you reach your struggling learner.

1. Teach Through "Direct Instruction."

Direct instruction is a proven method in which the child is taught exactly what he needs to learn. With direct instruction, the information is presented very clearly through well-tested materials that rule out the possibility of misinterpretation and confusion. And your child is shown exactly how to *apply* the information, too. The explicit teaching of language rules and patterns means that your child doesn't have to guess or struggle to figure out how to read or spell a difficult word.

2. Choose an Incremental Approach to Lessons.

Incremental means that lessons start with the most basic skills and gradually build up to more advanced skills. Each lesson builds upon previously mastered material, and gradually increases in difficulty.

Incremental instruction provides a "no gaps approach" that allows your child to learn one new piece of knowledge at a time in a well-thought out, logical sequence. With this approach, kids can successfully climb to the top of the learning ladder—step by step by step—and reap the rewards of mastery in reading and spelling *without* all the struggles along the way.

3. Understand the Importance of Multisensory Instruction.

Multisensory learning happens when sight, sound, and touch are used to learn new information. Children learn best when they can use all their senses. When children can see a concept as it is explained, hear about it, and then do it with hands-on activities, it is easier for them to learn and retain the new information.

In a multisensory spelling lesson, for example, your child can see a new word spelled out with letter tiles, hear and see a demonstration of a related spelling rule, try out the spelling rule for himself by manipulating the letter tiles, and say each sound of the new word as he writes it out on paper. This combination of activities uses multiple pathways to the brain.

4. **Give Your Child an Advantage by Teaching the 72 Basic Phonograms.**

Kids who struggle with reading and spelling often have a misconception: they think that the key to reading and spelling success is memorizing strings of letters. But the fact is that it's very difficult for children to memorize words this way. They often just get frustrated and give up.

There's a better way. Teaching phonograms helps kids see spelling as a doable task. A phonogram is a letter or letter combination that represents a sound. For example, CK is a phonogram that says /k/ as in *clock*; OY is a phonogram that says /oi/ as in *oyster*.

Each sound in a word can be represented by a phonogram. If your child learns the phonograms and which sounds they represent, reading or spelling the word will become so much easier. If he knows that the sound of /j/ at the end of a short-vowel word is spelled with DGE, the word *bridge* becomes simple to read and spell.

5. **Teach Just One New Concept at a Time.**

When you dump too much information into your child's mental "funnel," your child's memory can only attend to a certain amount of the new information. Teaching one concept at a time respects the limitations of your child's short-term memory, and allows concepts and skills to be more easily stored in the long-term memory. And that means significant amounts of meaningful learning can occur.

6. **Teach Reliable Rules.**

Children are really helped by knowing a few reliable spelling rules. For example, knowing the rules regarding the use of C and K can help them spell words like *kitchen*, *acceptable*, and *automatic*. When

your child learns trustworthy spelling rules—like the Kids' Club Rule—he'll have some guidelines to help him make the right letter choices.

7. **Teach Reading and Spelling Separately.**

On the surface it may seem to make sense to teach reading and spelling together. But in reality, although they are similar, reading and spelling require different teaching techniques and a different schedule. Reading is easier than spelling, and teaching these subjects separately is much more effective for most kids. Separating these subjects allows kids to progress as quickly as possible through reading while taking as much time as needed in order to become an effective speller.

8. **Make Review a Priority.**

Consistent review is the key to getting spelling facts and spelling words to "stick." Teaching something once or twice does not mean your child has actually mastered it. Mastery takes time—*and* practice.

Review doesn't have to be boring, either. Have your child practice spelling concepts with letter tiles and flashcards and through dictation. Use a variety of techniques to ensure that your child retains what you are teaching.

9. **Keep Lessons Short but Frequent.**

Short, frequent lessons are much better than longer, sporadic lessons. In a short lesson, your child's attention is less likely to wander, and you'll find that you can actually accomplish more. Keep the lessons upbeat and fast-paced, and use teaching tools and activities that engage the child's interests.

Start with 15-20 minutes per day, five days a week. You can adjust the length of the lessons up or down according to your individual child's attention span and specific needs. (Here are guidelines for lesson length for teaching reading and teaching spelling.)

10. And Finally, Recognize the Power of Encouraging Words.

In the ups and downs of the daily grind, we sometimes get so focused on teaching and "improving" our kids that we forget to encourage them. The first nine tips are all built into the *All About Reading* and *All About Spelling* programs, but putting the power of encouraging words to work in your homeschool is all up to you!

For many people, using encouraging words doesn't always come naturally, so we created a way to help moms and dads remember how important it is. Be sure to visit our blog post on 7 Ways to Be the Teacher Your Child Needs and download the free poster as a reminder.