

Many children will be left behind... reading and the slow learner

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The No Child Left Behind legislation seems to promise all American children opportunities to successfully learn to read side by side and grade to grade with their classmates. But for some children, this promise cannot be kept.

Many children do not have the same intelligence and language skills as their classmates. They have been labeled as "slow learners." As many as three or four learners in any typical classroom are markedly slower in learning and thinking.

This makes reading extremely difficult for these children.

Special education services are offered to children who are not achieving to their potential. But the slow learning child is doing his best – it is frustrating to watch the child try and try again only to fall short in the classroom and on school or state tests.

How can a parent help the child who tries so hard and has such difficulty? The slow learner can learn to read – it takes patience and determination as well as compassion.

Some ways that a family can help this child learn are:

Do read with them every day – lap reading tells your child reading matters.

Read the same book over and over. The child who is a slow learner needs much repetition and rereading the same book is necessary and helpful.

Keep the reading times short. It is better to keep the child interested than

to "force feed" her after she is already frustrated and tired. It is easier for the child to read twice a night in 10-15 minute periods than to read for a solid half hour.

Try to keep a positive attitude – your child will certainly be aware of how you feel. Your child will learn new words more slowly and will require more practice to truly memorize new words.

Talk, talk, talk to your child about the events of the day, the school and the world. We know that language is the key to truly comprehending what is read and parents are the best language teachers of any child.

The Cooters are professors of education at the University of Memphis. They work with school districts, teachers and parents across the nation helping children gain reading skills.

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