

Supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

Some strategies to help you support your child while learning at home and guidance on using our **Rapid series** for struggling readers.



Illustration by Kanae Sato

Introduction



During these unsettling times, it's a tricky balancing act for parents with school age children. This is especially hard when your child may have some additional needs.

The aim of this guide is to provide some simple strategies and tips that you can use to help support your child's needs at home, as well as guidance on how to help your child with their reading using our Rapid Phonics and Rapid Reading ebooks, designed specifically for struggling readers aged 7-11.

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Practical guidance for supporting SEND learners at home



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From parents to parents

As an ex-teacher and Pearson employee, like many parents I am trying to work from home at the same time as homeschooling during the school closures. In addition, one of my two children has additional needs. Even coming from a teaching background, it's hard to juggle the two roles at the same time. The first thing to acknowledge is that you can only do so much. Over the last few weeks I have, through trial and error worked out a way to get through the time homeschooling is necessary. Below are a few strategies which work for me and my son to get through the days. It has to be remembered that one size does not fit all, with many different reasons for a child being on their school's special needs register and hence requiring many different interventions. Not all of these tips will be practical or work for everyone, but I hope you find some that work for you and your child.



Talk to the teachers

- ✓ If you haven't talked to your child's teacher already, it's a good idea to do so. Talk to them about the best ways for you to support your child with the work that they are being given.
- ✓ If the activities they are being asked to do are not working with your child, see if their teacher has any suggestions for possible alternatives or strategies to use.

Working space

- ✓ Set up a clear space to work and minimise distractions in the working area.
- ✓ Sit next to each other to work. That way, you can glance over to see what they're doing or lean over to help without too much disruption to your work.

- ✓ If you know what strategies are in place to support your child in the classroom, try to replicate them at home. If there is equipment they use, e.g. pencil toppers, special seats or cushions, weighted blankets, will the school let you borrow them or could you recreate something similar? If your child is used to using coloured overlays for reading, printing on coloured paper may help with reading for those with dyslexia.
- ✓ Display work that has been a success and that your child is proud of. It will help to motivate them. However, ensure that it isn't distracting at the same time.

Structure and routine

- ✓ Give some routine and structure to the day as you would when going to school.
- ✓ Ensure there are breaks when your child can move around, go outside and run around. Starting the day with some sort of exercise can get them ready for the day too.
- ✓ Prepare the night before so you know what you are doing throughout the day - transitions can result in meltdowns and confusion/mayhem. If you can, write a plan for the day on a whiteboard or some paper so that your child knows what to expect. Often, children with SEND don't cope well with sudden change, unexpected surprises and not knowing in advance. It will also help you to anticipate where the issues might be. If they are being asked to follow a video lesson with integrated written exercises, are they supported enough for their particular needs? Can the teacher be asked for further support, or could you put additional support in yourself?
- ✓ Having said this, within the routine, try to give some variety to activities too!
- ✓ If you find that something isn't going well and resulting in anxiety or additional pressure for both of you, try something that you have in reserve that you know will work and come back to the other thing later.

Supporting with school work

- ✓ Open ended tasks can be really tricky for some children. If you can, try to spend a few minutes talking about the subject or task to help ease into it and give it some scaffolding. (As would happen in the classroom before an activity).
- ✓ Perhaps discuss or write down a plan for completing the activity, then before they start give reminders to help with completing the answer, e.g. to write in full sentences.
- ✓ With longer tasks, break them into smaller chunks and set one bit at a time. E.g. start off on one question, glance over to see if it's looking ok and then move on to the next one.
- ✓ If you access to a computer, typing written work can be really helpful. It means that your child can concentrate on the spelling, grammar and what they are trying to say rather than the handwriting and how to shape the letters. It also makes editing much easier! You can still practice handwriting separately.

Help with organisation

- ✓ Once a piece of work is done, file it away somewhere so that you can refer to it again if needed.
- ✓ If you know your child has done something before that's relevant to a new piece of work, remind them and suggest they get it out to look at again.



Illustration by Kanae Sato

My son has severe learning disabilities so for us it's about finding him engaging age-appropriate content that piques his interest and then using that as a springboard into as many areas as possible in reading, writing and maths.

As it's a challenge to maintain learning for any length of time, we have realistic expectations of the amount of work he will do and recognise when is a good time to stop.

What's important to us is that he continues to do some work everyday so that he's not losing the skills he's developed through his 'normal' learning. It is a challenge but well worth the effort!



From experts to parents

I am a parent and a SENDCo working across two primary schools supporting children with special needs, and their families. This is a difficult time for all children, but even more so for those children who find change to their daily routine unsettling.

Personally, I believe that the most important thing during these unsettling times is for our children to feel happy and safe. Sometimes, as parents, we can feel pressure that all school work must be completed. However, a child who enjoys their work, is well engaged by it and feels good about what they are doing is much more likely to progress well with their learning, than one who feels overwhelmed, disengaged and struggles. This means that if a child is feeling overloaded by their school work, it may be better to follow their interests. For guidance on this, it's important to talk to their class teacher and share your thoughts and concerns with them.

Caroline Sutton-Reid



Writing

Just a little bit of support can make a big difference here and help your child to be more open to their writing tasks. Sometimes, it is helpful to consider whether it is more important for the child to get their ideas down on paper or to focus on their handwriting and spelling.

- To encourage reluctant writers, you can try writing down tricky words that they may need when they are writing, so they aren't worrying about how to spell them and can focus on their ideas.
- Using the dictate function on a tablet or laptop can also allow a child to get their fabulous ideas down without the barriers of spelling or tricky fine motor control.

- Children are sometimes stuck with how to start when faced with a blank page; writing the first sentence or paragraph for them can help.
- Also, try thinking your thoughts aloud whilst you write so children can develop their inner writing voice, helping them construct and edit their sentences.

Anxiety

When children feel worried or anxious it's useful to have some strategies to support them through this.

- Some children can find it difficult to recognise and identify anxiety so it is important to talk to them about it and describe how it can make your body feel - faster heart rate, butterflies in your tummy or can't get your thoughts straight.
- Encourage your child to breathe deeply and slowly to calm down; try doing it together with them to support them.

Routines also have a significant positive impact for most children; children like to know when things are happening, just like many adults do.

- A visual timetable can be really helpful for this; a simple plan for the week ahead with pictures showing activities or work to be done (stick people drawings are fine here!)
- For children who need something more short-term, a "Now, Next" approach can be helpful. Use the language of "Now we will practise writing, next we will play a game (or something else that they find fun)".

If you find that your child's anxiety continues persistently or becomes worse, do seek help. Your child's form tutor or school SENDCo are good people to turn to for initial advice.



Wellbeing

Ensure that your child has good sleep routines, regular healthy meals and exercise. Try to limit screen time, especially before bedtime.

- Keeping a gratefulness diary has been shown to be effective in improving children's wellbeing. Each day, ask your child to make a note of one or more things that they are grateful for; these can be small or large things that apply to them or others in the world. When they are feeling down, they can look back at their diary to remind themselves of all the positive things. For younger children, this can be done verbally through meal time conversation or through drawings.

During this period of time, take advantage of the fact that we are spending so much time together in our little families and enjoy your time with each other!



nasen (National Association for Special Educational Needs) is a charitable membership organisation that supports education practitioners by providing training, resources, advice and information to enable staff to meet the needs of all pupils including pupils with learning differences.

Here are their suggestions for supporting children with SEND in home learning:

- Speak with your child's class teacher about any specific strategies that were being used successfully in school that could also be used at home. Some schools are also lending out specialist equipment to families.
- Agree some shared targets with school, which will help the process of transition back into school when the time comes.
- Establish a regular routine, but remember you don't need to stick to it rigidly. It's useful to be flexible in case children become restless or tired.
- Remember that there are lots of different types of learning: it's not just about books, paper and online. Activities such as baking, arts and crafts and walks in the park can help to promote and develop: understanding and use of language, skills such as measuring and estimating, colour and shape matching, fine motor skills (think of cutting, stirring ingredients, etc).
- Try to build in some activities designed to support mental wellbeing, such as children's yoga (there are lots of excellent free videos online).
- Don't feel you have to be an expert in everything. It can be useful to admit that you are unsure of how to do something, as you can then problem solve together with your child. As well as modelling that it's okay not to know everything immediately, this will develop problem solving skills, which will continue to be useful once children return to school.
- To help with routines, try creating a visual timetable of the day and even the week. This will help children to understand the sequence of activities during the day. If you have access to a printer you can both take photos of activities and the associated equipment (reading books, pencil/pen and paper) or search online together for images to represent the activities. If you don't have a printer, children could draw the pictures. Each activity can be ticked off when it is completed.
- Ensure there is also plenty of downtime for children (and the wider family). Unstructured time is an important aspect of wellbeing and development.
- It could be useful to spend some time practising and developing independence in self-help skills such as simple cooking or organisation strategies..
- Be kind to yourself! The truth is that the process of learning is often unpredictable – the journey is as important as the destination...

For more information about **nasen** or to register for free membership, please visit **www.nasen.org.uk**



Getting into reading with your child - how you can make a difference!



There is plenty of evidence to show that reading for pleasure makes a big difference to children's educational performance. In fact, reading for pleasure is more likely to determine whether a child does well at school than their social or economic background.

Reading can be tricky for children with SEND, but this is something that you as a parent can make a huge impact on without it taking up a lot of your time. Whatever age your child, if you can read with them five times a week it will make a big difference to their progress and also to their interest in reading. This can be any sort of text: a comic, information text, a story book. You can also take turns in reading to help encourage reluctant readers.

To help you do this, we'd like to introduce you to Rapid Reading and Rapid Phonics.



Rapid Phonics and Rapid Reading are ideal for all children who need support with their reading, including those with dyslexia. The font used

has been specially designed in consultation with the British Dyslexia Association (BDA) and always appears on a cream background to support dyslexic readers. The texts have been approved by dyslexia experts.

The Rapid programme provides the small but important steps that will move struggling readers aged 7-11 years from a reading age of 5.0 to a reading age of 8+. The lower levels (Stage 4 and below) are designed to be suitable topics for children who might be deemed struggling readers in Year 3 and above, with a reading age range of 5-7, whilst Stages 5 and above are more suitable for older readers (Year 5 upwards) with a reading age of 8-10. We recommend checking a book thoroughly before giving it to a child younger than the intended audience.





Hi and welcome to Rapid Phonics and Rapid Reading

My name is Dee Reid and I am Series Editor of Rapid Reading, and I'd like to give you a few tips on using Rapid books at home.

The good news is that Rapid is really easy for you to support your child with reading at home and the stories and non-fiction are designed to be appealing to children who may not always find reading very enjoyable.

What makes Rapid easy to use at home is that each text has a Before Reading page which you can use with your child to introduce the text. Throughout each text there are activities which check on how well your child has understood what they have read. So, you don't need to rack your brains to think of follow-up questions – they're all there for you.

If your child finds reading difficult, it's really important that they practise reading every day. Obviously, they're not going to do this if they find reading boring or too much effort! The trick is to keep the reading sessions short. If you can spare 15 minutes a day to supervise them as they read, that would be great.

Encourage your child to get involved with their own progress e.g. you might say: 'You did really well reading the story, Rusty and the Crossing (Watch Out!). Are you ready for the challenge of reading about real road safety? (Road Safety (Watch Out!)) It's fine for your child to re-read a Rapid book they've already read.

Reading something that's not too much hard work will build your child's reading confidence.

It's tough being your child's parent and teacher but 15 minutes a day individual support at home is probably more support than your child's school was able to provide when our schools were open. So actually, lockdown might just give you a chance to boost your child's progress in reading and that would certainly be some compensation for all the other awful aspects of being stuck at home!

So, good luck with using Rapid! I know it can make a difference to your child's reading ability and I hope it makes your new role as a teacher a lot easier.

If you have any queries about your child and reading, then drop me an email. I'd be only too happy to help.

Stay well and stay safe,

Dee Reid

Educational Consultant and Series Editor to Rapid Reading and Rapid Phonics

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I'm ready to go! How do I access the books?

Speak to your child's teacher to see if they use Rapid then take a look at our guidance below.



How should I use the Rapid Phonics and Rapid Reading books?

It is very easy to help your child use the Rapid Phonics and Rapid Reading books because within each book you are told what to do.

Before reading

On the page before the story or the information begins, there is a 'Before reading' page. This page is for you to introduce the text to your child before they start reading

- You will find a list of tricky words - these are words which appear in the text but may be unfamiliar to your child. You should be ready to help them with those words if they get stuck on them when they are reading. Click on each word so that your child can hear them, and encourage your child to practice these words out loud before they start to read.
- In fictional stories, you will also find the characters who appear in the story. Read the characters' names and look at the mini pictures of each character.
- Finally, click on the 'Rapid boy' icon and listen to the story starter. This will help your child to get an idea of what's coming next and 'tune them in' before they start reading on their own.



Tip: It's important to try to ensure your child is reading at the correct level of text difficulty, but within a Stage it's fine for them to choose which book they would like to read first either fiction or non-fiction.

During reading

- After you have shared the 'Before reading' page with your child, ask them to start reading on their own.
- If they can't read a word, ask them to try to work it out. You could:
 - > ask them to try to break the word into separate sounds and then blend the sounds together to make the word
 - > tell them to read on past the word that they are stuck on and then think about which word would fit
 - > tell them to go back to the start of the sentence and read up to the word they are stuck on and see if they can work it out.



- If your child still can't work out the word, click on the word to hear it. The clicked word will be highlighted as it is read aloud.

- The child can also click on the 'Read to me' button. This will read the story to your child. In Rapid Reading, each sentence is highlighted so that your child can follow the text as they listen. In Rapid Phonics, each word is highlighted to ensure decoding is as easy as possible. They can then have a go at reading each page independently.



- Some of the pages include activities. Click on the 'Rapid boy' icon to launch the activity in a pop-up window. These activities help to check your child's understanding of the text.
- You will also notice that there is a Record button on the bottom right hand corner of each page of the eBooks. If you click this button, it starts recording your child's voice as he or she reads. Click the button again to stop recording. You can record using the computer's built-in microphone but children may find it easier to use a headset, particularly if there is background noise. Please note, the recording function is only available on PCs.



- It is a really good idea to praise your child whenever you can. They might pretend that they are not bothered about what you think, but the chances are that it means a lot to them if you tell them they have done something well and it will make them try to do even better next time.

How do I choose which book to start with?

Please note that **Rapid Reading** is suitable as a catch-up programme for children in Key Stage 2 only, so that's Year 3, Year 4, Year 5 and Year 6. It is not suitable for younger children. **Rapid Phonics** is suitable for children in Years 2-6. It is not suitable for children in Reception or Year 1.

Follow the link below to complete a form to sign up for Pearson's online reading platform ActiveLearn Primary.

If your child uses Rapid Reading or Rapid Phonics in school, you or they may know which Rapid level they are on or the school may have told you this already. However, if you do not know your child's Rapid level, we recommend that you use the following information as a guide.

For **Rapid Reading**, you will need to know your child's reading age. You can either make a close guess or speak to your child's teacher. Add this information to the sign-up form where prompted. We will then allocate the correct level books for your child.

Reading ages are as follows:

- 5yrs – 5yrs 3m
- 5yrs 3m – 5yrs 6m
- 5yrs 6m – 5yrs 11m
- 6yrs – 6yrs 5m
- 6yrs 6m – 6yrs 11m
- 7yrs – 7yrs 5m
- 7yrs 6m – 7yrs 11m
- 8yrs – 8yrs 5m
- 8yrs 6m – 8yrs 11m
- 9yrs – 9yrs 5m
- 9yrs 6m – 9yrs 11m



For **Rapid Phonics**, you will need to know, or have an idea of, where your child is in terms of their phonics learning. In the sign-up form, you will be asked to select from Step 1, Step 2 or Step 3. If in doubt, select Step 1. It will not cause any harm to do a little bit of revision before progressing up the levels. A summary of what is covered in each step is below.





- **Step 1 books**
– alphabet letter-sounds, for example: s a t p i n
- **Step 2 books**
– common digraphs, for example: sh, ch, ai, ee, ar, er, oi, ou
- **Step 3 books**
– different ways of spelling the letter sounds, for example: for the sound /ai/ (as in rain), alternative spellings include a-e split digraph (gate), ay (play), ey (they), a (paper).

Further information about [Rapid Phonics](#) can be found by looking at the [Rapid Phonics book list](#) and the [Rapid Phonics sound chart](#).

Remember, don't choose a level that's too difficult for your child. They won't enjoy reading it and they probably won't be able to do the activities throughout the book. If it's a bit easy – that's OK – this is not real school and we're all just doing our best and it's important that your child feels successful and wants to read more.

Also, where possible try to give your child an element of choice between fiction and non-fiction and which book in the stage they want to read. This increases the level of commitment they will give to reading the text.

For additional information, you can watch these short videos aimed at parents using Rapid via **ActiveLearn Primary**:

-  [ActiveLearn Primary Parent Login](#)
-  [ActiveLearn Primary Pupil World](#)
-  [Introduction to Rapid in ActiveLearn Primary](#)
-  [How to use your Rapid Reading and Rapid Phonics eBooks](#)



Useful links from Pearson



[Pearson's Mental health and wellbeing](#) – support resources for teachers, parents and young people during this unsettling time.

[Pearson's Handy Little Guide to Dyslexia](#) – although created to support students learning a foreign language, this guide provides some specific tips to support dyslexic learners with spelling, vocabulary, grammar and reading.

[Help struggling learners to close the gap](#) – a guide showing the positive impact of Rapid resources on UK schools.

Useful links from other organisations

[BBC bitesize Parents' toolkit:SEND](#) – additional resources, activities and support for all ages and needs

[NSPCC](#) – advice for parents and carers on supporting SEND children during coronavirus (COVID-19)

[ChatterPack](#) – a voluntary-run, special educational needs and disabilities hub offering free resources, advice and information.

[The Sensory Projects](#) – provides a useful list of inclusive resources helpful for those looking for activities to do whilst staying home and staying safe.

<https://mindedforfamilies.org.uk/young-people/> – great resources for families seeking advice for children's mental health

<https://youngminds.org.uk/> – great resources for families seeking advice for children's mental health

www.nasen.org.uk – a charitable membership organisation that supports education practitioners



Resources from Pearson

Primary

Rapid Reading is used by thousands of schools to help their struggling and disadvantaged children with SEN catch up in reading. It's independently proven to make more than twice the normal rate of progress in reading.



For schools wanting to find out more about **Rapid Reading**, please visit

pearsonschools.co.uk/rapidreading

For parents with primary children wanting to buy Rapid Reading books, check out our Amazon Store.

[Amazon store](#)

Primary

Rapid Phonics are used by thousands of schools in the UK. Studies found children quadrupled their expected reading progress and doubled their expected spelling progress.



For schools wanting to find out more about **Rapid Phonics**, please visit

pearsonschools.co.uk/rapidphonics

Secondary

Rapid Plus was developed alongside Dee Reid, founder of Catch Up, to support KS3 struggling, EAL, and SEN readers. It's independently proven to more than double progress in just a few months.



For schools wanting to find out more about **Rapid Plus**, please visit

pearsonschools.co.uk/rapidplus



[The key features of Rapid Plus](#)



[Using Rapid Plus with dyslexic students](#)



Visit pearsonschools.co.uk/rapidplus to find out more information