

Does your child hate 'spelling'?



The acquisition of reading precedes the learning of writing and spelling. An interest in reading leads to further building of vocabulary and word recognition for a child. Once spelling tests are introduced children learn spelling, and build up a dictionary of words which they can use to create sentences. Creating a written story is a continuation of imaginative play.

However, reading is not easy for all and worse still is spelling. Reading (decoding) requires the child to put the phonic sounds in order, but not all children are able to do this and instead read by word recognition or by sight. In comparison the process of spelling (encoding) is reversed. The brain is asked to retrieve the sounds in the sequence they appear in the spelling. So if the child is not processing sounds when reading the ramification impacts spelling. Consequently, the child will not be able to retrieve the sounds in the correct order to perform the particular spelling task at hand.

What makes the English language so very complicated is that it is not a true phonetic language – with a language such as Spanish, sounds in the word match the sound of each individual letter. Thus, once you learn the letter sounds, the phonics, you can apply them when reading and spelling. In contrast, the English language includes non-transparent words like 'was'. Therefore it is difficult to explain the reading/spelling rule for the word 'was' to a five year old.

By Usha Patel, Learning Difficulties Therapist

The child just has to accept that the word is not phonetically transparent, irregular, and has to be 'learnt by route', both in terms of reading and spelling. As a result, the systematic process of decoding by looking at the letters and applying their sound is not relied on by readers. So, it is only by being an avid reader that you can acquire the complexities of spellings.

When summarising the barriers to spelling a child may experience, weaknesses in the following areas can often be seen:

- handwriting ability (or fine motor coordination problems)
- phonic knowledge (the knowledge of the 44 sounds in the English language)
- visual memory needed for irregular spellings
- sequencing skills for working out regular spellings
- long term memory for remembering spelling rules
- poor eye-tracking for discriminating individual letter arrangements in reading

Of all the weak areas listed above, the eye related issue are the one least detectable and the one that affects reading comprehension as well as spelling. It also links to visual memory (letter configuration) and visual sequencing (connecting what is seen with phonic knowledge) when reading, which in turn impacts spelling skills. Early reading experiences include misreading many words such as: stop/spot, was/saw, where/were. However, this misreading becomes reduced as the reader matures and learns contextual self-correction. Nevertheless, as the individual letter arrangement has not been looked at, the child remains poor at spelling.

So, if your child hates spelling, how can you help?

If your child has weaknesses in the areas mentioned the speediest route for improvement is through kinaesthetic

experience – a 'touchy feely' route in learning how to spell. For example, tracing a word using a finger in wet sand is a lot more memorable than using pencil and paper...and is more fun!

The kinaesthetic tips used at my practice to help children learn tricky spelling include:

- Cursive handwriting- this helps embed spelling as a physical patternmaking process.
- Touch-typing- suited for children that is linked to a good phonics programme.
- Ball bouncing- bouncing out spelling (Bal-A-Vis-X helps with this).

At my practice 'Raviv Practice London', I take the time to understand what methods a child employs for reading so I can work out a system best suitable to utilize for teaching him or her to spell. Remote interventions can be carried out at home with the support of special worksheets in problem areas.

Usha is running Fast ForWord® reading sessions throughout the summer. Fast ForWord® aims to help improve Memory, Attention, Processing Speed and Sequencing skills which can translate to better decoding, phonemic awareness, spelling, understanding syntax, reading fluency, improving grammar, and reading comprehension.

Contact her for more details.

www.ravivpracticelondon.co.uk or 07766 837 616.

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Usha Patel is a Learning Difficulties Therapist. Her focus lay in using non-invasive motor sensory techniques and specialist software for cognitive enhancement.

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