

Ten things parents can do to help their children become better spellers.

1. When reading to your child, point out patterns that occur across words (“Look! The ‘e’ at the end of *bike* and *cake* make the ‘i’ and ‘a’ say their names!”). Encourage your child to look for other words with the same pattern.
2. When your child asks you how to spell a word, don’t automatically spell it for him. Ask him to think about the sounds in the word, the letter patterns of other words that are similar, and the meaning of the word.
3. When your child brings home his weekly spelling list, ask her to look for patterns that occur across words and to group words together according to the same pattern; we don’t want her to think that words can only be memorized.
4. Encourage your child’s teacher to teach her students to think about the sounds, patterns, and meanings that dictate why words are spelled the way they are.
5. If your child is stuck on how to spell a word, start by asking him to think about each sound he hears in the word and putting at least one letter for each sound; make sure he writes the letter(s) at the exact same time that he says the corresponding sound.
6. Point out how words that are related by meaning often use the same base or root (“Hey! *Magician* and *magic* have similar meanings. I see *magic* in *magician* even though I don’t hear it in there”).
7. When your child needs to spell a long word, encourage her to think of smaller chunks within the word that have meaning (“*comfortable*. Well, I know how to spell *comfort*, and I know *able* is often spelled as a-b-l-e. Let’s try that”).
8. When you are helping your child learn to spell a word, associate it with a word he already knows how to spell (“How do you spell *broach*? Well, it rhymes or sounds a lot like *coach*. Use *coach* to help you spell *broach*.”)
9. When spelling a word, encourage your child to say the individual sounds (not the letter names) as he writes the corresponding letters; we say *sounds* and we write *letters*.
10. Don't dismiss spelling as something that can be corrected by spellcheckers. It can't.

Don’t stop there.

- Write to your school boards about strengthening classroom spelling instruction for all students.
- Get remedial help for children who need it and seek out specialists who understand the importance of spelling and the proper ways to teach spelling.
- Help children understand that good spelling is for everyone and poor spelling is an impediment for future education and employment opportunities.

Making a Difference in K-12 Education