Reading decodable sentences at home

A guide for parents and carers of children learning phonics (about ages 4 to 6)

What a decodable sentence is

A decodable sentence uses only the letter sounds your child has been taught, plus a few tricky words they have learned by sight. So your child can read every word by saying the sounds and blending them. Guessing from pictures or the first letter isn't needed, and that builds the habit good readers use.

Sound buttons

Under each word on the cards are sound buttons. A dot means one letter makes one sound (c-a-t). A bar means two or three letters make one sound together (sh-o-p, n-igh-t). Your child touches each button and says the sound, then sweeps a finger under the word and blends: "sh, o, p ... shop".



Tricky words

Words like the, to, I, was and you don't sound out with the sounds learned so far, so they have no buttons. On the tricky word cards the hard part is marked. Read the word, point at the tricky part, read it again. Five quick goes a day beats one long go a week.

A five-minute routine

1. Read the new sounds on the card together. 2. Your child reads the sentence, sound by sound. 3. Read it again, more smoothly. 4. Ask one question about it (Who? Where?). 5. Colour a dot. Stop while it is still fun.

When your child gets stuck

Point to the word and say "sound it out". If a sound is wrong, point to that letter and ask "what sound does this make?". If a tricky word is wrong, just tell them the word. Praise the trying: "You sounded that out all by yourself."

Moving on

When your child reads a card smoothly, with few pauses, move to the next set. If a set is hard, go back one: it is normal to need a few days on each. Your child's teacher can tell you which set the class is on.