

Home Schooling a Child with Down Syndrome:

Grade 1 Reading

Suggestions & Resources

*Grade 1 level material would
be for Down Syndrome
children about ages 7-10+*

Skill Sample:

*Auditory discrimination
Initial, medial, final sounds
Initial and final blends
Digraphs, Diphthongs,
r - controlled
Soft/hard c and g
Synonyms, antonyms
Compound words
Clapping syllables
Reads & comprehends
stories
Answers questions
Reads sight words*

Author Note

Many families teaching on this level use bits and pieces of different resources. But they do have one thing in common. They have a checklist of skills. They know what skills are learned by normally developing first graders. They also realize that no matter what curriculum they use, they will need to adapt it to meet their child's individual needs. Before listing a few resources, let's talk about some basics concerning adapting curriculums for a child with Down Syndrome.

Adapting A Reading and Phonics Program

The child with Down Syndrome lacks the ability to learn in one year what their normally developing peers do. It may take three years or longer for some children. He must learn at his own special pace appointed by God. He also needs something more than just more time in order to learn. He will need *strategies*, *mnemonics*, and *systematic* teaching. *Systematic* means that skills are taught in an organized way and that those skills are broken down as needed into smaller more manageable successful chunks. He will also need *strategies* and *mnemonics* to help him remember the phonics rules for reading. Now let's look at some suggestions about adapting curriculum.

For your first year or longer at this grade level it is suggested to focus on learning the reading vocabulary words that are most meaningful to your child. You might be able to use the curriculum you used to teach grade one to your other children to get a list of words. If it is too confusing, look at Pat Oelwein's book. She suggests teaching phonics using word families. Whether you use Pat's book or your own curriculum to obtain a list, chunk the words

that are most meaningful to your child into phonics groups such as short vowels (CVC), short vowels with final blends (CVCC), Short vowels with initial blends, long vowels and so on. Remember to use the words in oral and written sentences so that your child is developing comprehension skills. Use pictures and objects relating to the words whenever possible.

When teaching your child to read words with phonics, do not isolate each sound in a word. Read the word as a whole unit. It is frustrating for a child with speech difficulties to isolate sounds (some call this blending) and then put them together again to make a word. Phonics is only one tool for reading and you want reading to be a positive experience. To ease frustration, say new words slowly as whole units. Then touch below each letter with your finger and give its sound. Sweep your finger below the word and say the word as a whole unit again.

The first year all you really need is a list of words, 3 X 5 cards, and your computer to type out sentences and short stories for your child to read. If your child can write well enough, you can use some workbooks to reinforce what you are doing. If your child can write, it does make learning more multi-sensory. If he cannot use a pencil, though, you can have him trace words with his finger to add another sense to learning or use lowercase letter tiles. And as you teach him to read don't forget to read to your child and ask *who*, *what*, *when*, *where* questions on his level, perhaps one question per page.

A comment needs to be made about the blends and other words that your child cannot pronounce. You may need to accept your child's close pronunciation of a word as long as he understands the word receptively. If he can match the word "ship" to a picture of a ship then he knows the word even if he cannot

pronounce it yet. (This is a speech problem not a reading problem.) You be his voice and say the word in order to model how the word should sound, but do not tell him he is wrong.

As your child works on a set of words, write sentences or type them on your computer. You might find some simple clip art relating to the words that he is learning to read. Put these computer stories into a first book for your child.

Finding appropriate readers can also be a challenge. The problem with most phonetic readers that they use short vowel words exclusively, the sentences given are not how you would say them in everyday life. For example one book had the word “bin” for the manger for Jesus.

Later, you might take the words he already knows and work on opposites, synonyms, and compound words with this same group of words. A note about reading needs to be made here. Children with Down Syndrome can learn to read, but their reading vocabulary can sometimes get ahead of their comprehension. They catch on to phonics and may be able to read words at a third grade level, but their comprehension skills may be only first grade. Instead of introducing new reading vocabulary, work on help your child use the words that he has already learned to read.

- ∞ Teach him to spell some of the words that he would need in everyday life.
- ∞ Teach him to write simple sentences.
- ∞ Help him to use some of the words he has learned to read in his every day speech.

Finding appropriate workbooks to help reinforce reading can also be a challenge. There may be too much on a page or the print may be too small. It may get progressively more difficult starting with simple pages but then the print gets smaller and less space is provided for writing. Also be aware that different workbooks

present phonics rules in different orders and they may also teach phonics very differently.

Curriculums

❖ ***BJU Press Grade 1 Phonics and Reading**** (1-800-845-5731)

❖ **The Stevenson Reading Program**
www.stevensonlearning.com

This program is designed for children with learning problems and uses a clever mnemonic in the form of a sandwich to aid memory and help understand word patterns.

❖ **Wilson Foundations** Level K and 1
www.wilsonlanguage.com (800-899-8454)

This program has strategy that is effective for those with special needs such as dyslexia.

**If your child needs more practice in one skill area, you may need to put the curriculum aside and find readers and activities that provide more practice before moving on. The Primary Phonics readers are a good choice.*

Additional resources

❖ **Brigance Inventory of Basic Skills (Pre-K-grade 9)** (See the *Early Inventory* pamphlet for the number to call for this resource.)

This covers grades pre-k through nine. You might consider purchasing the *Inventory of Basic Skills* if you need a checklist of skills. A record book is provided to check off progress and check the grade level at which your child is learning.

❖ **Teaching Reading to Children with Down Syndrome** by Patricia Logan Oelwein
Woodbine House (800) 843-7323

The teaching strategies in this book should be used concurrently with any other curriculum you choose to use. This is book is an essential resource!

❖ **Plaid Phonics A, B, C** (full color)
❖ **Phonics Practice Readers Series A, set 1** (short vowels)
Pearson Learning 1-800-321-3106
www.pearsonlearning.com.

This is a set of workbooks that may provide extra practice. Book A has a simple format and good white space, however, books B and C have more on a page and may have too much reading for some Downs children.

❖ **McGraw-Hills Spectrum Phonics for Grades K & 1 workbooks**
(CBD Catalogue 1-978-977-5005)

❖ **Explode the Code Series.**

Educators Publishing Service (800) 225-5750
The pictures are line drawings. There may be a few pictures you may want to white out such as a monster.

❖ **Primary Phonics Series**

Educators Publishing Service (800) 225-5750
This set of workbooks is very simple and very systematic. There is a set of ten readers that corresponds to each workbook. The pictures are line drawings. Some of the sentences are silly. There may be a few pictures you may want to white out.

❖ **Early Reader Series**

Alpha Omega Publications (800) 622-3070
These phonics readers have Biblical stories. There are three sets. Each set practices a different skill (Short vowels, long vowels, special vowels)

❖ **Reading Reflex**

(Found in most bookstores)
This book has a systematic strategy for teaching phonics. It is not a complete curriculum and you need to add readers.

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