

A script for when you freeze at the reading table

Say This - The Parent Anti-Freeze

The book is open. Your child is looking at the page. You're looking at your child.

And your brain has gone quiet.

You know you should say something. But the right thing won't come. So, you read the words, and then it's over, and neither of you quite knows what just happened.

This is the script for that moment. Not a lesson. Not something you have to memorise. Just the actual words, for the moments that happen every time you sit down.

Pick the one that fits tonight.

The Say-It-Out-Loud Method

1. Look at what's on the page
2. Say what sounds you see, out loud, like you're thinking to yourself
3. Ask one question. Then wait.

Everything in this script is a version of those three moves.

1

When your child gets stuck on a word

Say this:

- "Point to the first letter. What sound does that make?"
- "Let's go through it slowly – what's the first sound?"
- "Break it up. Say each sound, then push them together."

Then: Give them time. Blend it with them if they need it.

The instinct is to keep things moving. But accuracy is the habit you're building. A child who stops and works out the sounds – even slowly – is doing exactly the right thing.

What it builds:

- Decoding accuracy
- The habit of going back to the sounds instead of guessing past them

2

When they rush through without taking anything in

Say this:

- "Read that sentence again, slowly."
- "Before we turn the page, what do you notice?"
- "Tell me one thing about what just happened."

Then: Ask them to point to the last word they read. Start there and read it again together.

The pause is the whole move. Rushing is how children experience reading as performance rather than thinking. The question makes them go back to the text and actually read it.

What it builds:

- Comprehension
- The habit of slowing down and processing what's on the page before moving on

3

When they say "I don't know" to everything

Say this:

- "Read that last bit again, out loud."
- "What was the last word you read? Let's start there."
- "Try it again – start at the beginning of that sentence."

Then: Have them re-read the sentence aloud. Listen for where they lose the thread.

"I don't know" sometimes means they decoded the words but the meaning didn't land. Going back to the sentence and reading it aloud again finds where the thread broke. The answer is usually there – they just didn't catch it the first time through.

What it builds:

- The habit of going back to the text when understanding breaks down

4**When they read the words but lose the thread****Say this:**

- "Read that sentence again. Now, what did it tell us?"
- "What was the character doing in that part?"
- "Can you say what just happened in your own words?"

Then: Ask them to point to the specific sentence. Read it together. Then ask what one word in that sentence tells you about what's happening.

Decoding and understanding aren't always the same thing. A child can read every word correctly and still lose the thread. That's not a decoding problem – it's a comprehension moment. The question finds where the meaning stopped landing.

What it builds:

- Comprehension
- The habit of checking understanding sentence by sentence, not just at the end

5**When the session is falling apart****Say this:**

- "You pick one page. Just one."
- "Let's do two minutes. Then we stop."
- "Do you want me to read, and you just listen?"

Then: Do whatever they say. One page still counts.

Two minutes where your child stayed present is more useful than fifteen minutes where they checked out halfway through. A session falling apart is a signal, not a failure.

What it builds:

- Resilience in routine
- The experience that reading doesn't always have to be hard

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When they say "I hate reading"

Say this:

- "That's okay. What's hard about it right now?"
- "Are you tired, or is it this book?"
- "Do you want to pick a different one?"

Then: Listen. You don't need to solve it in that moment.

It's rarely about reading. "I hate reading" almost always means something more specific: tired, embarrassed, stuck on the same words, wants to be somewhere else. The question finds out which one. Once you know, the answer is usually obvious.

What it builds:

- Emotional literacy
- The experience of being heard when something is hard

7

When they get something right

Say this:

- "How did you know that?"
- "You spotted that really fast. What were you looking at?"
- "That's right. Tell me more."

Then: Make them explain it. That's where the learning is.

Praise closes the loop. A question opens it. Asking how they knew something makes them notice their own thinking, and that is the skill underneath all the other skills.

What it builds:

- The habit of understanding how they know things, not just what they know

8

When you don't know what to say next

Say this:

- "What do you think happens next?"
- "What would you do if you were this character?"
- "What's the most interesting thing on this page?"

Then: Don't explain. Just listen to what they say.

These three questions work on any book, any page, any reading level. You don't need to know the story to ask them.

What it builds:

- Prediction
- Seeing the story from the inside
- Noticing what's on the page before the question is even asked

A note before you go

You don't need to use all these tonight.

Pick the situation you're likely to hit. Try one line. See what happens.

A session where you said one thing that made your child stop and think, even for a moment, is a good session. However messy the rest of it was.

None of this is about getting the reading right.

It's about what happens between the page and your child's thinking. The question that makes them look twice. The pause that lets them work something out. The moment you stayed in it instead of ending the session early.

Not the book. Not the word they finally sounded out.

The fact that you were there, and it mattered.

From the team at Tricky Brains

Helping children build confident, curious minds.