



Sacramento County READS

Importance of Explicit Reading Instruction for Students with Extensive Support Needs



Students With IDD Can Achieve Significant Literacy Milestones

Students with extensive support needs, including those with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) such as autism and Down syndrome, have historically been underestimated in their capacity to develop literacy skills. Traditional instructional approaches often limited these students to sight-word recognition strategies, neglecting comprehensive reading instruction. However, recent research underscores that with explicit, systematic instruction, students with IDD can achieve significant literacy milestones, enhancing their academic and life outcomes.

Research indicates that students with IDD benefit from instruction that explicitly addresses each of these areas [below], enabling them to develop robust reading skills.
(Lemons & Balasubramanian, 2025).



Key Components of Effective Literacy Instruction

Aligned with the science of reading, effective literacy instruction encompasses five critical components:

- **Phonemic Awareness:** Recognizing and manipulating the individual sounds in words.
- **Phonics:** Understanding the relationship between letters and sounds.
- **Fluency:** Reading with speed, accuracy, and proper expression.
- **Vocabulary:** Comprehending and effectively using a wide range of words.
- **Comprehension:** Grasping the meaning of text and making inferences.

What Is Explicit Reading Instruction?

Explicit reading instruction is a structured, teacher-led approach that involves:

- **Clear Modeling:** Demonstrating specific reading strategies and skills.
- **Guided Practice:** Providing opportunities for students to apply new skills with immediate feedback.
- **Systematic Progression:** Introducing concepts in a logical sequence, building upon previously mastered skills.

This method ensures that instruction is intentional and tailored to individual student needs, minimizing confusion and maximizing learning outcomes.



Sacramento County READS

Importance of Explicit Reading Instruction for Students with Extensive Support Needs

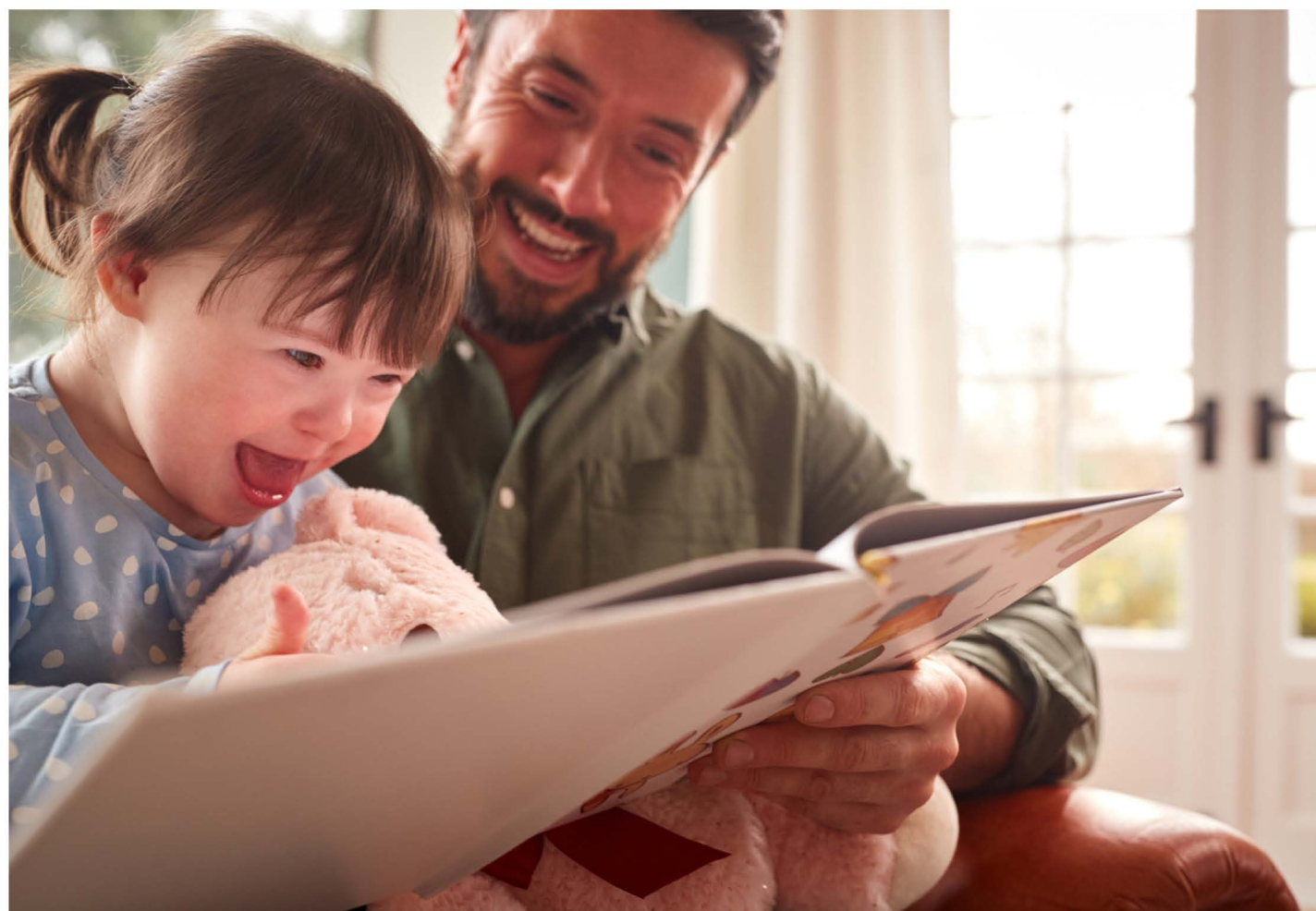


Benefits for Students with Extensive Support Needs

- **Enhanced Learning Outcomes:** Explicit instruction has been shown to improve reading proficiency among students with disabilities (Archer & Hughes, 2011).
- **Increased Independence:** Developing literacy skills fosters greater autonomy in academic and daily life activities.
- **Improved Self-Esteem:** Success in reading can boost confidence and motivation to learn.
- **Better Post-School Opportunities:** Literacy is linked to higher rates of employment and quality of life in adulthood.

Action Steps for Educators and Families

- **Set High Expectations:** Believe in the potential of students with extensive support needs to achieve literacy.
- **Implement Structured Programs:** Utilize evidence-based curricula that emphasize explicit instruction.
- **Collaborate Consistently:** Maintain open communication between educators and families to reinforce learning across environments.
- **Monitor Progress:** Regularly assess student development to inform instruction and provide targeted support.



Every student has a right to the opportunity to become a proficient reader. By embracing explicit, systematic instruction, educators and families can unlock the full potential of students with extensive support needs, paving the way for academic success and lifelong learning.

To learn more . . .

Learners with Disabilities Benefit from More Complex Reading Instruction
Structured Literacy: An Approach Grounded in the Science of Reading