

Is it OK for children to skip over words they don't know?

Question 9 from Helping Your Child Become a Reader
(Scanlon, Anderson, Barnes, Morse, & Yurkewecz-Stellato, 2024¹)

Yes, if they go back to them after reading on a bit. When children come to unknown words and can't figure them out using their phonics skills and word identification strategies, it is often helpful for them to read past the unknown word as this may help them figure out the puzzling word. Often when beginning readers read out loud, they may skip over unknown words and silently read past them.



Children are often taught to use this strategy as one tool in figuring out unfamiliar words. Since using this strategy may take a while, be sure to give children enough time to figure things out when they want to try. Skipping over the occasional word is only a problem if the child doesn't go back to the skipped word to try again. Also, note that when a child skips over words frequently it is likely that the text is too challenging and/or that the child isn't using helpful strategies. Offering easier texts should help.

¹ The complete 23 question booklet can be accessed at: eltep.org/isa-parent-booklet
All individual questions and the complete booklet can be shared for non-commercial purposes.