



## Can Reading Out Loud Reduce Anxiety?

by Shirin Zarqa-Lederman, MA, MS, BCPC, LCADC, LPC, CFC

---

Nervous Nelly. Worry Wart. We all know one, and we might even be one or have one of our own. It's rather likely, considering that anxiety affects 1 in 8 American children, according to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America.

---

**I have a 6-year-old** who reads everything out loud ... and by everything, I mean *everything*.

When driving, “Mommy, the street sign says STOP!”

Lying on the couch, “Mommy, do not remove this tag.”

In the mall, “Mommy, every kiss begins with Kay.”

In the laundry room, “Mommy, the dryer says, done.”

And even watching TV, “Mommy, Pneumococcal Pneumonia,” followed by giggles.

The list goes on but you get the point. She’s not afraid to sound words out or ask for help sounding out words and through all of it, she remains cool as a cucumber.

Her sister? Not so much, she’s the “Nervous Nelly.” She has a constant “but what if...” and she keeps track of everyone.

“Mommy, where is Daddy? He said he’d be home by 6:00, and it’s 6:02.”

“Mommy, what happens if I run out of tissues?”

“Mommy, my tooth fell out a week ago but I don’t see one coming in.”

Again, the list goes on, but I am sure you get the point.

One night, I asked her to read *me* a bedtime story. After a few minutes of her reading to me, I noticed that all of a sudden, the child who could not keep her head on straight without worrying about “what took you so long?” was relaxed. Her attention was solely focused on reading that book. Then it occurred to me: *Could reading aloud really calm my Nervous Nelly?*

Reading does have a therapeutic benefit. Psychology has adopted “bibliotherapy” as a psychotherapeutic technique for centuries. The ability to identify with a character in a book or to their experience can be beneficial in the same way members in self-help groups are beneficial. Characters are full of human flaws that make us feel perfectly imperfect. Reading allows us to identify with characters and reflect on our own human condition. And you can do it so silently that no one will ever know how imperfect you are, unless of course, you choose to read aloud.

Reading out loud also provides a great deal of benefit for children.

From a literacy development standpoint, reading out loud gives children an opportunity to increase their fluency. Fluency is based on the reader’s ability to recognize words automatically. In turn, this increases their vocabulary and grammar skills. In 2015, a study done by the National Institute of Health confirmed that “vocabulary and grammatical knowledge” were related to text reading (a.k.a. reading out loud) fluency.

Science also indicates that oral reading also increases comprehension. In 2013, a study published by Science Studies of Reading examined reading comprehension scores based on silent reading verses oral reading, and confirmed that children had higher comprehension scores reading orally.

Added Bonus! As their accuracy increases, they are more aware of the connotations or meanings and emotions that are attached to words. They also get to understand emotional reactions, which helps regulate their own emotions. The more expressive a child becomes, the more they comprehend what they are reading and how characters feel.

Not only does reading aloud fine-tune a child’s ability to read and better comprehend what they are reading, it allows them to build on social skills. Reading aloud gives a child practice with speaking in front of an audience, which can also help in overcoming social anxieties as the child develops into adolescence and early adulthood. It provides an opportunity to practice communication skills by improving their listening skills.

As children gain self-confidence in their reading skills, they gain positive self-worth and self-esteem. They feel good about reading and about themselves.

By no means am I suggesting that you give them a stage and a Shakespearean sonnet, but just a few minutes of a non-judgemental ear. Be attentive while they read to you. Fair warning: As children become better at reading out loud, they will want to read everything out loud. “Mommy, next exit in 10 miles...” ●