Cathy Puett Miller's Advice for First-Time Tutors
When you're a first-time literacy tutor, you may have a few apprehensions:

- Can I do this?
- Will I be able to help my child?
- · What if the things I try don't work?

It's okay to have those reservations. Most volunteer programs are designed so that the tutors don't need to be education experts. Insist that the program you choose offer some sort of orientation for you, either as a training session which everyone attends together, as communication through handouts or as personal interaction with the coordinator, administrator of the effort or a mentor tutor who has done this before.

As a part of orientation for tutors in the "Reading is for Everyone" program in metro-Atlanta, GA, I always provide lots of ideas to get volunteer tutors started. Here are a few:

- Be sure to use at least some books that are "easy" for your students to read. They will be afraid to read again for you if they fail continually. Choose several books to bring to an early session, and let at least one of those be two grades below the child's current grade. Let them pick the first book they'd like to read with you. Experts say that the chance a student will enjoy a book doubles or triples when the student chooses that book for himself.
- Don't be afraid to have a little fun find the funniest, silliest books you can and laugh together. Suggested titles are any of the <u>Junie B. Jones</u> series by Barbara Park (good for kindergarten through 3rd grade), the <u>Captain Underpants</u> series by Dav Pilkey for 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade boys, <u>Ramona</u> books by Beverly Cleary, <u>Parts</u> by Tedd Arnold (any age), <u>How to Eat Fried Worms</u> by Thomas Rockwell (4th grade and above), and <u>A Pizza the Size of the Sun</u> by Jack Prelutsky (fun poetry for all).
- Use the first session as a "get to know you" meeting. Make sure you introduce yourself to the child and that they understand why you are together. A simple statement like " Hi, Billy. I'm Mrs. Jones and you and I are going to work together to improve your reading skills for a half an hour a week. Will you be my partner in this?" goes a long way to setting the tone. You can take a few books to choose from so you'll have material for the first "literacy" session the following week.

- Sit beside your students, not across a table from them. Remember to respect their space; different children have different needs in this area.
- While walking to the session site, review with your student what you will cover that day and when returning them to their classroom or hallway, summarize what they did and what they need to work on before the next session. Remember we have no authority to require a child to do work away from the tutoring session but sometimes they will do it if you ask so at least encourage them to read daily (parents of these students are asked to read with them at least 15 minutes a day).
- If an elementary school child's teacher believes it would be helpful, use part of the third or fourth session for the child to write a letter to the parent(s), telling how sessions are going and perhaps suggesting a book or literacy-related activity they could enjoy together. We do not want to offend parents or usurp their decisions about their children but, if they are open to help, this is a great avenue. The child can take the note home.
- Teach your student how to pick a book (many poor readers don't have this skill). Choose one on a topic they like or by an author whose other works they've enjoyed. Read the IBSN summary on the back of the title page (if there is one) or read the comments/summary on the dust jacket or back of book. Read at least 2-3 pages in the front of the book and then somewhere in the middle.
- Don't over-explain. Say the minimum amount needed to assist the student. Keep the focus on each session on the student's readings and explanations, not yours.
- Always introduce the book that you have <u>pre-read</u>, to the student before beginning to read with the student. Show them the book front; review the title and author's name. If the book has a cover, read the summary inside or look for a summary on the back of the title page with the copyright information.
- Occasionally, read a book 1-2 levels above the student's reading level (with you doing the reading). Most children have a higher listening vocabulary than they have reading vocabulary. From time to time, stop and ask the child comprehension questions (who, what, when, where, why, how) or whether they recognized the meaning of a particular word which you think they might not know. Use this time to expand vocabulary by discussion word meaning.