

SHARING BOOKS

Books and stories are a window of opportunity for all sorts of exciting things that children might not otherwise see or experience and reading books regularly with your child has many positive effects besides this. It may be part of your calming bedtime routine and can be a peaceful bonding moment between you and your child as you give them your full attention after a busy day. Reading and listening to stories is also a fantastic activity for boosting your child's language skills. Shared reading can benefit all children regardless of their literacy skills or confidence as readers.

Why are books important for developing speech and language skills?

When you are reading with your child, not only are you modelling vocabulary and language for them, but you are also providing clear speech models too. Developing good oral language skills and awareness of the speech sounds within words gives children a great start to developing their literacy skills. After all, literacy is a form of language, so children need to have a solid foundation of spoken language skills to build on.

Building a wide and deep vocabulary

Not everything a child hears and learns about will be in their immediate environment - some children will live far from the ocean or mountains, or perhaps will never see certain animals. All these things and more can be seen and talked about in books, opening children up to a wider range of experiences and vocabulary. As your child's literacy skills develop and they begin reading independently, their exposure to more sophisticated vocabulary increases considerably.

While children may be exposed to many of these things online or on television, these devices do not always provide the same conversational language experience that reading with another person can offer. Reading can be taken at the child's own pace and it's easy to pause to explore something that interests your child. You have the opportunity to make links between the child's own experiences and what they are reading. Talking through these experiences strengthens children's memories of them.

Stories contain all sorts of people, creatures, actions, shapes, sizes, colours, textures and concepts to build a child's vocabulary. Not only will they be exposed to new vocabulary, but also the grammar surrounding that vocabulary. They will hear how new words fit into a sentence. Children need to hear new words in grammatically correct sentences to develop their language effectively.



Strengthening Emotional Vocabulary

As well as offering a rich language experience, stories also offer children opportunities to explore the emotions of the characters. They can listen to how those emotions are described and expressed. This can be supported by parents and carers using different facial expressions and tones of voice to match the content of the story. Children will experience empathy with characters, creating opportunities for parents to talk about any feelings that arise. This helps children make sense of the events in the story and increases their exposure to a broad emotional vocabulary.

Developing Inferencing Skills

Inferencing skills become increasingly important as children's reading focus steers more towards understanding what they've read, rather than just decoding the words. Shared reading experiences allow children an opportunity to hear a parent or carer make these links out loud, explicitly connecting events and explaining the motivations of characters. You can build on this by asking targeted questions and pausing at key moments in the story so that you and your child can summarise and discuss your predictions for what will happen next.

Acquiring Phonological Awareness Skills

Reading books with your child provides an opportunity to support their phonological awareness skills. Phonological awareness refers to the ability to identify and manipulate the individual sounds in our language. Children must learn skills such as identifying individual sounds, recognising rhymes and syllable breaks, and segmenting and blending sounds together in order to become successful readers.

You can support your child's early phonological awareness before they start school and continue to support it while they are learning to read. As children develop their reading skills, their ability to manipulate the sounds within words becomes more sophisticated.

Supporting your child's phonological awareness at home can begin with reading books that contain rhyme or repetition of sounds. For younger children, nursery rhymes are a great place to start, along with familiar fairy tales that contain repetitive, rhythmic language, for example, 'Run, run, as fast as you can, you can't catch me, I'm the gingerbread man!'

Young children often enjoy alliteration, for example, 'six silly sausages singing songs.' You can try clapping out the syllables in different words, choosing from different pictures in the story. Your child might like to find all the things on the page that begin with a particular sound. Playing word games and having fun with sounds all contribute to supporting successful readers, and your child will enjoy having these playful interactions with you.

What can I do while I'm reading with my child?

Sharing books with your child can be so much more than a quick bedtime routine. It can add another rich language experience to your child's day. Here are some useful tips for making the most of your time spent reading with your child:

- **Pause for discussion** – talk about the key events in the story or follow your child's interests and make the most of opportunities to explain new vocabulary or concepts.
- **Remember that you don't have to read the words on the page** – this is especially relevant for younger children or children who have language difficulties. Talking around the pictures on the page, summarising the story and chatting through inferences or predictions are all really valuable things to do and a great way to revisit familiar books.
- **Model new vocabulary and repeat it often** – children need multiple exposures to new vocabulary to learn it securely. Once you've finished your story, keep revisiting any new words and find ways to use that language again in everyday contexts.
- **Use new vocabulary in grammatical sentences** – try to use any new words in different kinds of sentences, modelling correct grammar and sentence structure e.g. "**pose** for a picture", "The cat is **posing**", "I **posed** the teddy", "that's a funny **pose**".
- **Use language in context** – let your child hear the language that describes their experiences as they happen. During shared reading activities this can be done by drawing the child's attention to key parts of any illustrations, or if you're not reading a picture book you could use props, gestures, or actions.
- **Link the content of stories to your child's experiences** – this helps them to better understand what's happening. Talking about events strengthens memories of their experiences and consolidates understanding of new vocabulary.
- **Help your child to infer information in the story** – talk out loud about the connections between events and the motivations of the characters. Point out cause and effect situations.
- **Talk about the emotions of characters in the story** – it helps children to be able to label their emotions and make sense of what they are feeling in everyday scenarios, and being able to recognise the emotions of the characters will help them to make inferences about the story.
- **Build phonological awareness skills** – think about rhyme, syllable clapping/tapping and listening for the first sound in words. This will support early literacy development and decoding (phonics) skills and it can also support learning new vocabulary securely.