

Especially for parents of toddlers! 

Let Me Tell the Story

Storytelling and Listening

Long before children read on their own, they can engage in shared book reading activities with grown-ups. Shared reading is a powerful way to learn new words and create a love of books and reading. This handout describes ways to build these early literacy skills.

What is the practice?

Toddlers learn about reading while listening to, looking at, and talking about the story in a book. Asking questions that encourage your child to talk with you about a story helps expand his listening and speaking skills.



What does the practice look like?

Snuggling together in an armchair with your toddler's favorite book creates a great opportunity to "read" together. As you read the story, stop frequently and ask your toddler *wh-* questions about the pictures or story. Encourage him to talk about what he sees and understands. Ask *wh-* questions like "What do you see in the picture?" or "Where did the boy go?" This helps him talk about the story. Be patient while he tells you about what he thinks is happening.

How do you do the practice?

- Start by asking your toddler which book he wants to read.
- Ask your toddler to tell you what the story is about if it is an old favorite. If it is a new book, look at the pictures with him. Then ask what he thinks the book is about.
- As you look through the book together, let your child hold it and turn the pages. Don't worry if pages get skipped. When reading with a toddler, saying every word is not necessary. Just tell him the story as you go along. Encourage your child to talk with you about the story. Ask questions like, "What do you think will happen next?" or "Why is the little girl crying?" This will encourage your toddler to give answers longer than one word. *Who* and *What* questions encourage children to talk more than questions that can be answered with a "Yes" or "No." "Is the dog brown?" is an example of a Yes/No question.
- Show your interest in what your toddler says by following his answer with another question. For example, "You think she is crying because she is scared? Why do you think she is scared?"
- Smiling and commenting on his attempts to answer your questions shows your interest and keeps him involved in reading.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Is your toddler able to describe more about the stories or pictures?
- Does your toddler enjoy reading books with you?
- Does your toddler want to tell you about the stories?

Take a look at more shared book reading

Story Time Questions

Jenna's mom reads with her 2½-year-old daughter as part of their bedtime routine. They snuggle down on Jenna's bed with her favorite books. Taking the book Jenna picks first, her mom asks Jenna what the book is about. Jenna says, "Bunny bedtime." Mom elaborates on what Jenna says with, "The bunny is saying 'good night' to everything in his room." Then Mom asks, "What are the things in the bunny's room?" As they continue to read the book, Mom asks Jenna questions about the pictures and story. She knows Jenna enjoys answering her questions because she smiles at her each time.



Selecting Books at the Library

Every few weeks, 2-year-old Mollie and her mom borrow new books from the library. While they choose books, they play a guessing game. They take turns making guesses about a book just by looking at the pictures. Mollie's mom starts the game by asking Mollie what she thinks the names of the characters are. Or Mom asks what Mollie thinks is happening in a certain picture. Mom can tell Mollie likes a book by how long she wants to look at it.

Touch-and-Feel Books

Leah, a toddler with a visual impairment, loves sharing books with her mom before her brother comes home from school. To help Leah, her mom uses books with lots of textures, or books with sounds and big, bright, simple photographs. One of Leah's favorites is *Pat the Bunny* by Dorothy Kunhardt. Each time they read it together Leah's mom asks her questions like "How does the bunny feel?" She encourages Leah to touch the bunny illustration with its patch of soft fur. To expand their conversation about the book, Leah's mom asks what sounds the animals would make. They talk about which pages are favorites, and why they like them.

