

Especially for parents of toddlers!

I Wanna Be a Storyteller

Storytelling and Listening

Telling stories is one way to help your toddler learn basic story forms long before he learns to read. He'll get to try out new words and feel good about his own storytelling skills, too. Use the following ideas to boost your toddler's enjoyment of listening to and telling stories.

What is the practice?

Toddlers love to hear stories about themselves or other family members. Family storytelling allows toddlers to learn to listen to and tell stories about important people in their lives. Give your young child many chances to take part in creating, telling, and retelling stories.



What does the practice look like?

When a toddler repeats a story told by another person or a story she made up, it's called *repeated storytelling*. A toddler might tell what happened when playing with a friend. She might retell a family tale about a funny thing that happened at her birthday party. Repeated storytelling helps toddlers see the order of events in a story. It also teaches new words ("Once upon a time") and builds enjoyment of this art form.

How do you do the practice?

When can a toddler take part in storytelling and repeated storytelling? Perfect times and places include riding in a car, and settling in for a nap, or bedtime at home. Waiting for food in a restaurant, attending library story hour, or just snuggling with you on the sofa are good times, too.

- Think about topics that interest your toddler. If your toddler loves trains or has a favorite pet, make up a story about one of those interests. Your toddler is more likely to take part in storytelling if the story is about something that interests him. Young children often like to hear stories about themselves (the day they were born, for example). Or they like stories about their parents ("When I was a little boy like you....").
- Find a time and place likely to encourage your toddler to join in storytelling. Choose a place where you can hear each other clearly. Since toddler attention spans can be short, choose a time when there will be few distractions.
- You could start the story, then ask your child to add to it. When telling a pretend story, ask your toddler to make up details ("How does the dog in our story look?"). If the story is about a real person or event, ask for some details your child knows about them.
- Retell the same story at different times. With each retelling, ask your child to supply more parts of the story. Soon she will be able to tell the whole story on her own!
- If your child finds it hard to retell a story, let her choose between two ways the story might continue. "Now does Suzy go to the zoo or to the beach?"
- Smiling and responding to your toddler's efforts will keep her interested in the story.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Is your toddler telling more stories?
- Does your toddler seem to enjoy telling stories or helping you tell a story?
- Has your toddler tried to tell stories on her own?

Take a look at more storytelling activities

Storytelling Together

Ben, a 2-year-old, loves to play with his stuffed dog, Ralphie. Ben's dad delights his son by making up and telling exciting stories he calls "The Adventures of Ben and Ralphie." Dad always begins a new story by recalling things he knows Ben enjoys doing, like splashing in water. "One bright day, Ben and Ralphie put on their swimming suits and jumped into their pool," Dad says. Ben's eyes light up, and Dad asks him what the friends would do in the water. Together they weave a story about water fun, with Ben giving Dad the exciting details.



At the Library

Knowing that Dana likes to listen to stories, her mom checks at the library for the next story time. Mom and Dana sit together while a librarian tells and reads stories and teaches songs. Seeing her mom's interest and excitement, Dana becomes interested and excited, too. Mom knows her daughter is enjoying the event. Dana keeps looking at her and giggling and smiling at various parts of the stories.

Photos Prompt Storytelling

Davy is almost 3 years old, but he uses language more like an 18-month-old. Davy's mom decides to take photos of him playing on riding toys with his brother. She uses the pictures to help Davy tell a story. Mom asks which picture he wants first. After he hands her one of the color prints, she starts a story. She asks questions like "Who is in the picture?" to help him add details. Davy answers, "Troy." Then Mom asks "What is Troy doing?" Davy answers, "Riding bikes." Mom moves through the stack quickly, getting Davy to talk about each picture as she goes. She knows he enjoys this form of storytelling. When Davy sees the pictures around the house, he brings them to her and the storytelling starts again.



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Looking at Books Together

Storytelling and Listening

Before a child reads on her own, she needs to share books with adults. Shared reading is one way to become aware of the rules about printed material. Reading to toddlers improves their understanding of both printed material and oral language. This handout includes ideas to help strengthen your toddler's understanding of printed materials—an important early literacy skill.

What is the practice?

Toddlers learn about reading when they look at and talk about words in a story with an adult. This exploration of books helps toddlers understand that printed letters and words have meaning.

What does the practice look like?

You can help your toddler understand that the printed matter (pictures, letters, and words) in a book has meaning. Talk with your child while pointing out pictures, words, or letters that match what you are saying. Ask your child to point to the picture of her favorite animal. You find and point to the word that labels the animal.



How do you do the practice?

Most days present natural opportunities for sharing a book with your toddler. Before a nap or while waiting for dinner are good times to pick up your toddler's favorite books to share.

- Be sure the books interest your child. Toddlers always seem to have one or two favorite books that you can keep on hand. You can also introduce some new books about things that she likes.
- Let your toddler be a leader, choosing which book she wants to read.
- As you talk about the book, point to pictures, words, and letters. Tell your child, for example, "This word is dog. Can you show me the picture of the dog?" Or "This letter is A. That is the first letter of your name, Alan."
- When you are reading a sentence, move your finger under the words you are reading. This shows your toddler that English words are read from the left to the right side of the page.
- Occasionally point to a letter like *B*. Explain, "This letter is a *B* and it makes the *Bbb* sound, like in the word *baby*." Ask her to say *Bbb* or *baby*. This helps her begin to see the connection between letters and their sounds.
- As you "read" the book, let your child hold it and turn the pages. Don't worry about skipping pages. With a toddler, reading every page is not necessary. Letting your child hold the book and explore it encourages her to take an active part in the reading experience.
- Smiling and commenting on her exploration of the book or her attempts to answer your questions encourages her. A little encouragement will help keep her involved in the activity.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your toddler notice the printed words or letters as you talk about them?
- Does your toddler seem to enjoy looking at books with words?
- Does your child point to letters and words, trying to say them?

More looking at books with your toddler

Reading While Waiting

Devonne, age 25 months, and her mom often find themselves waiting. They may be waiting at a doctor's appointment or at the laundromat for the clothes to finish drying. Devonne's mom always has a few of her daughter's favorite zoo books with them. She will pull them out and let Devonne pick the one she wants first. Mom asks her, "What is the picture on the cover?" and points to the word zoo in the title. Devonne turns the page and Mom points to the word zoo when she reads it. Mom keeps reading the book as Devonne asks questions. Mom points to the letters and words until Devonne gets tired of reading.



Bookstore Time

Two-year-old Tamsin, her mom, and her big brother, David, often enjoy browsing at a neighborhood used-book store. Today Mom tells the children they may each select two books to buy and take home. Together they look at picture books in the children's section. They look at a book to decide if they want it. Their mom reads the title aloud while she points to each word. She encourages Tamsin and David to repeat the title. They explore each book, looking at the pictures and pointing to the words to see what the book is about. Finally the children pick their books and excitedly take them to the front to pay for them.

A Touch of Reading

Although 20-month-old Max has a vision deficit, his mom often reads with him. She uses books made of different materials or with different textures. One of Max's favorite books has a picture of an apple that is very smooth. Max touches the apple and his mom says, "It's an apple that looks good enough to eat." She then takes his hand and helps him feel the Braille words embossed on the page. Max's mom helps him touch the Braille letter "A". She tells him the name of the letter and that "A" is the first letter in the word *apple*.



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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.



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A Book By Its Cover

Storytelling and Listening

Toddlers often have a few favorite books they keep close by and want to “read” again and again. You can use these “old favorites” in your everyday routines. Use these books to help your toddler develop love of books, word skills, and familiarity with the structure of books.

What is the practice?

Toddlers learn to recognize favorite books by the pictures on their covers. The words on a cover also help them start learning the rules of print. You can help your toddler build important pre-reading skills by examining book covers with him. Encourage him to pay attention to a book’s cover. Ask questions and point out different features of text.



What does the practice look like?

A toddler selects a new library book to read at bed time. With help from his mom, he remembers the title. Together they point out and label the most exciting pictures and objects on the cover. They point out exciting pictures within the book. They point to the words in the title with their fingers while saying them. They talk about the particular features of this cover and book—how big it is, what colors they see, etc.

How do you do the practice?

Reading the same book over and over to a toddler can get dull for adults. But this process is an important one. Repeated reading gives toddlers the chance to become familiar with the words they are hearing. It helps them understand a story better, and start making connections among pictures, print, and spoken words. So take a deep breath and read it *again!* You’re giving your child a gift! Here are some ideas to make repeated readings more fun:

- Ask your toddler to tell you everything she can about the cover of her favorite book. What colors are there? What’s in the pictures? How do the people (or animals) look—happy, sad, scared, etc?
- Older toddlers can start thinking about why a cover looks the way it does. For example, ask her what she sees on the cover of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Eric Carle). Why is the caterpillar on the cover? With your help, she can begin to understand that a cover shows pictures of important parts of a book. She learns the cover can be useful in helping predict what a story will be about.
- Encourage her to find books by looking at their covers. For example, when she wants to read *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* (Laura Joffe Numeroff), tell her to go look at all her books. Tell her to find it by its cover picture, color, shape, etc. Give her clues until she recognizes it on her own.
- When looking at new books, start with the cover, too. Spend a minute looking at and talking about the words and pictures on the cover. Point to the words on the cover as you read them. This helps to make the connection between the words she hears and what she sees.
- Describing covers is a great opportunity for your toddler to learn new words. You can introduce and use color, size, and shape words to describe covers.
- This practice works best with old-favorite books. Toddlers are better able to pay attention to details in books they have seen many times. When you share a familiar book, see if you can both notice something new that you haven’t talked about before.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your toddler look at covers before opening books?
- Does your toddler use the cover of the book to identify which one she wants?
- Is your toddler excited about reading and talking about books with you?

Take a look at more fun with book covers

Follow the Clues

Two-year-old Gustavo sometimes has trouble finding his favorite story about *Bob the Builder* on his book shelf. When he tells his mom which book he wants to read at bedtime, she gives him clues about what to look for. "The book you want is yellow," she says, as Gustavo scans the shelf. "And it's short and fat." When he finds it, they spend a few minutes looking at the cover together before reading. "Who's that?" his mom asks. "Bob the Builder!" Gustavo says. "Right! And what's he doing?" "Driving." "Yes, he's driving on the road," Mom says. "I wonder where he's going. Should we read it and find out?" Gustavo opens his book happily.



Cover Clues

One of 3-year-old Liam's favorite things to do is pretending to "read" books to his baby brother. At the library, his mom helps Liam figure out the subject of different books by looking at their covers for clues. "What do you see here?" his mom asks, pointing to the bear on a book's front. "Big bear," Liam says. "That's right, so the book might be about the adventures of a big, brown bear," Mom says. "And paint buckets," Liam points out. "Could the bear be an artist?" Mom asks. "Here's the title." She reads the title out loud while pointing to each word. She knows Liam listens closely. When he shows the book to his brother at home, he tells the baby, "This is a book about a bear who paints with many colors."

Gotcha Covered!

Two-year-old Shanna has language delays and trouble staying focused. But she loves one-on-one time cuddling and looking at books with her mom. Mom starts their story times by showing Shanna the cover of the book they're going to read. As Shanna points to pictures, she names them. "This is a colorful cover, Shanna," Mom says, speaking slowly and clearly. "Do you see anything that's the same color as the little boy's orange pants?" Shanna looks around, and Mom helps by pointing to Shanna's shirt. "What about your shirt? Is that orange too?" "Orange," Shanna says, pointing from the book to the shirt. "Good!" Mom says. "What other colors do we see on this cover?" Sometimes they don't make it past the cover before Shanna loses interest in a book. But talking about what's on book covers seems to help Shanna make the connection between what she hears and sees.

