

*Especially for practitioners working with toddlers!* 

# Creating Young Storytellers

*Storytelling and Listening*

Introduce children early to the time-honored practice of storytelling. It is a great way for them to learn the basic structure of stories and to gain and practice new vocabulary. This practice guide suggests ways to promote a toddler's ability to enjoy storytelling and related activities.

## What is the practice?

Toddlers above all love to hear stories about themselves or other family members. This gives them many chances to learn to listen and tell stories with and about important people in their lives. By starting with this focus of interest, toddlers become active participants in the development, telling, and retelling of stories.



## What does the practice look like?

Repeated storytelling occurs any time a toddler repeats a story she heard from someone else or a story jointly made up by the toddler and an adult. A toddler might retell a story about what happened when playing with a friend. Retelling a story about a family trip to the beach is another example of repeated storytelling. Repeated storytelling expands a toddler's knowledge of how to put thoughts in order to form a story. It also increases the number of words they know how to use and their enjoyment of the art of storytelling.

## How do you do the practice?

Many opportunities to take part in storytelling and repeated storytelling happen every day. They might occur when children are busy with favorite toys, engaged in a book, or looking out a window. Try some of these ideas for prompting storytelling:

- Start by picking out topics that are interesting to the child. If a toddler is interested in trains or a favorite pet, make up a story about one of those interests. The toddler is more likely to participate in the storytelling moment if she finds the topic interesting. Remember that toddlers often like to hear stories about themselves or about the important adults in their lives. The story of the day the child was born is a favorite of many children.
- Choose times and places for storytelling that are most likely to make it easy for the toddler to take part. A place where you can hear the toddler and she can easily hear you is helpful. The attention span of a toddler is not long. However, it helps to have some time when there will be few interruptions.
- Start the story, but quickly encourage the child to add information to the story. If this is a made-up story, ask the toddler to add details to the story. For instance, you could ask the toddler, "What's the dog's name?" The story may be about a real person or event. If so, ask the toddler for some information she knows about the person or event.
- Retell the same story during different storytelling sessions. With each retelling, ask the toddler to supply more and more of the story. Keep on doing this until she is able to tell the basic story on her own.
- The child might have trouble adding his ideas to develop or retell a story. Try providing two possible choices and let him decide how to continue. "Does Papa Bear say his bed is too soft or too hard?"
- Smile and respond to the toddler's efforts to keep her interested in the story.

## How do you know the practice worked?

- Is the toddler repeating more stories?
- Does the toddler seem to enjoy telling stories or helping you tell them?
- Has the toddler tried to tell new stories when asked?

# Take a look at more learning to tell stories

## *Toddlers Telling Stories*

Jacque-Lynn, an early childhood specialist, likes to help classroom teachers encourage toddlers to become storytellers. She is talking with a teacher in a classroom of 2-year-olds about ways to include very young children in storytelling. It is spring in this rural farming community where most young children like the big farm machines. Jacque-Lynn and the teacher decided that toy farm machines and animals would be good to use with a small group of children. The teacher introduces the toy “props,” making sure the children know what they are. She then begins to weave a story with them. The teacher pauses and asks the children questions about the farm animals and equipment so the children become the storytellers.



## *Interest-Focused Stories*

Ava’s mom looks forward to when her daughter’s home visitor comes. Their meetings are a great chance to get helpful information. Ava’s mom heard on TV that it was important to tell stories to little children. However, she does not know how since Ava is only 20 months old. The home visitor starts by helping Ava’s mom think of what Ava enjoys. Mom mentions that Ava’s favorite toys are her baby doll and her stuffed dog. The home visitor suggests that Mom start making up a story with Ava about her favorite toys. Mom asks questions about the story that Ava can answer to keep her engaged. She might ask, “Where is the baby’s hand?” or “Do you want the doggie to go for a walk?” Ava and Mom create and tell the story together.

## *Signs and Visual Cues*

Dawn is a 2-year-old child who is hearing impaired. Her mother uses signs with Dawn to help her learn how to communicate. The home visitor who supports Dawn encourages Dawn’s mom to use props or pictures when telling a story. She suggests building the story around signs Dawn knows like Mom, Dad, red, dog, and cookie. Using a stuffed dog and a real cookie, Dawn’s mom draws her daughter into the storytelling by asking her questions with signs and gestures. Together they tell and sign a short story about the dog eating Dawn’s cookie.





## Take a look at more ways to share books



### *"Find What I Say"*

Matt is a toddler who likes looking at books with adults. Matt's home visitor taught Matt's mom a book game called "Find What I Say." It has become one of Matt's favorite games. Using a well-liked book, Mom points to a word and says the word. Mom then playfully says, "I don't think Matt can find the picture." Matt finds the picture, points to it, bursts out laughing, and joins the adults in applauding for himself.

### *"Reading" the Title*

Once a week, David and his mom have a home visitor who comes to see how 22-month-old David is doing. The home visitor helps David decide which book he wants to read. Mom reads the title, *Goodnight Moon*, while she points to each word. She encourages David to repeat the title and David says, "Moon." The home visitor says, "Yes, you're right, 'Moon.'" Mom reads both words in the title again, pointing to the words while David says, "G'moon." The home visitor comments to David's mom that he seems to like "reading" the title of the book because he keeps asking for it.



### *Signs and Reading*

Nina is a 22-month-old toddler who has a hearing impairment. Her mom uses both sign language and speech while they are looking at Nina's favorite books. While Mom reads, she signs and points to the words in the book. This helps Nina make the connection between the signed words and letters and printed words and letters. Nina likes her new alphabet book the best.



# Take a look at more reading together out loud

## Book Talk

The home visitor watches as Natalie's mom gets a handful of books and asks Natalie which book she would like to read. While they are deciding which one to read, the home visitor encourages Mom to spend time talking with Natalie about the books. They talk about what they think the story is about just by looking at the pictures. The home visitor asks Natalie, "What do you think the name of the little girl is?" and "What do you think is happening in this picture?" Natalie picks a book she wants to hear and the home visitor starts a shared reading session.

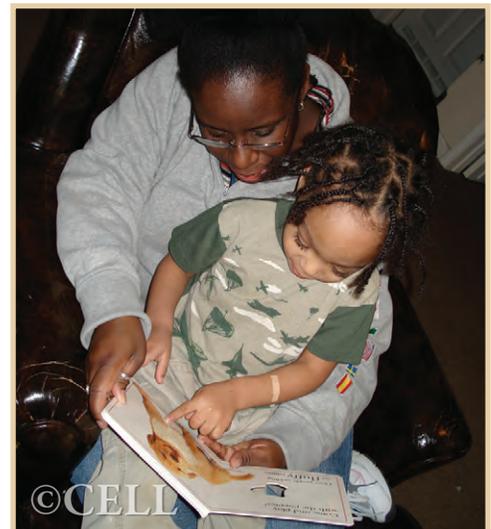


## Sharing Bedtime Stories

Ira's dad wants to know how to make the most out of reading books with his 2-year-old as part of their bedtime routine. He decides to ask his home visitor for some ideas. They talk about how getting ready for bed, snuggling together, and asking Ira which book he would like to hear can become their nighttime routine. They talk about the importance of following Ira's lead and of following up on Ira's answers to questions with more, related questions. The home visitor reminds Ira's dad to ask lots of w- questions, like "What does the boy do next?" or "Was the boy happy?" When Ira's dad tries these suggestions, he realizes that his son is enjoying the activity because Ira wants to talk about the story.

## Patience Pays in Shared Reading

Dexter has a disability that makes it hard for him to say what he wants to say quickly. The home visitor who works with him and his mom thought that shared book reading might be a fun way to help him. Since Dexter often carries his books around, the home visitor asked Dexter's mom to let him pick a book he would like to read. Dexter chooses to read a book Mom already knows he enjoys reading. The home visitor suggests that Dexter's mom ask him questions about the book he chooses. Mom asks Dexter, "What is this book about?" The home visitor reminds Dexter's mom to wait patiently for Dexter to say, "Big dog." She smiles broadly and says, "That's right! It is about a big dog." Dexter's mom points to a picture in the book and she follows this up with another question, "What is the dog doing?" Again she and the home visitor wait patiently for Dexter to give her an answer. As they read the story, the home visitor comments on how patient Dexter's mom is about letting him get his thoughts into words. She also tells Dexter's mom how helpful it is to prompt only if Dexter cannot find an answer.

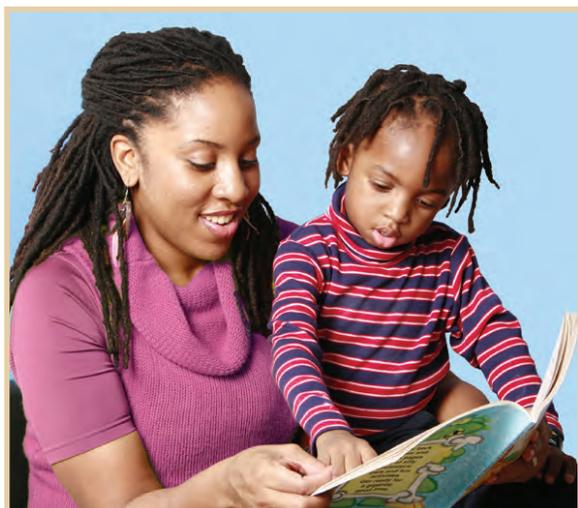




## Take a look at more picture books and toddlers

### *Toddler Reference Library*

In Casey's classroom, the toddlers have access to books in every learning center. Many of them are picture books, which the children especially enjoy because of the lively photographs or illustrations. In the manipulatives center, two boys consult a book featuring photographs of different styles of houses while building with Legos. In the blocks center there are books about cars and trucks. A group of children compares the pictures in a book as they play with their favorite toy models. In the art center, one child pages through an animal picture book before making an orange spider with play dough. The picture books are part of their daily routines. They give the children a chance to use books in both practical and enjoyable ways.



### *First Look at a New Book*

Twenty-six-month-old Della loves playing with all the toys her home visitor, Breanne, brings on her visits. She especially enjoys the new books Breanne brings weekly. Della shows them to her mom immediately. "What've you got?" her mom asks, sitting down next to Della. "Breanne brought you a picture book. Let's see what's in it." They look at the pictures together, talking about what they see. Della's mom knows not to worry about reading the words yet. Instead, they focus on whatever captures Della's interest. She and Breanne ask Della questions as they look: What do you see? What's this little boy doing? Where do you think he's going? The three of them tell a story of their own using the pictures.

### *Making Books of Our Own*

In Lesley's inclusive toddler classroom, she tries hard to make books accessible and enjoyable to all her children. One project her toddlers love is making their own books. She gives them magazines out of which to tear or cut pictures. Some children use adapted scissors. Lesley helps them glue their favorite pictures to sturdy construction paper. When the glue dries, she fastens their sheets together. She encourages the children to "read" their books. They read them back to her and to each other, using words or signs or a combination. Sometimes Lesley makes their books more "thematic," by providing only food magazines or only toy catalogs. Some of the children have already begun to "tell stories" with their handmade picture books. Others prefer naming their favorite objects on a page. Either way, they take pride in making their own books that they can "read."



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# Letters and Books

*Storytelling and Listening*

Before children can learn to read words, they first have to recognize the letters of the alphabet. Alphabet books introduce toddlers to the letters of the alphabet and to the sounds each letter represents. Alphabet books help children become interested in the alphabet. They teach toddlers letter recognition, letter sounds, and words that begin with the same letter.

## What is the practice?

Reading and sharing alphabet books helps children become interested in the alphabet by teaching letter recognition and letter sounds. Children who can identify letters and know different letter sounds have a large advantage in learning to read.

## What does the practice look like?

When looking at alphabet books with the toddlers in your class, point to the letters as you read the book. "Sound out" the letters and encourage the toddlers in your class to do the same. Follow the children's interests. If your class likes sharks a lot, choose an ocean-themed alphabet book to spark their interest.



## How do you do the practice?

There are many opportunities to read alphabet books throughout the school day.

- Put alphabet books in places that are easy to reach. Putting them in various activity centers allows toddlers easy access to the materials.
- Alphabet books come in many styles. Choose ones that are easy for the toddlers in your class to handle. Try board books or oversized books and look for ones that have bright, colorful pictures.
- Place a variety of alphabet toys around the room to reinforce toddlers' familiarity with letters. Some ideas include putting ABC stamps in the writing center and sponge letters in the water and/or art center. You could provide alphabet blocks in the block center and magnetic letters on the play appliances in the housekeeping center.
- When working with older "twos," ask the children to try forming the shapes of the letters with their bodies. They can do this on their own or as small groups. Children love to participate, and this is a great way to get them actively involved in the alphabet.
- Sing the Alphabet Song and other ABC songs with your class.

## How do you know the practice worked?

- Are the toddlers in your class showing interest in books?
- Do they point to the pictures and letters in books?
- Do the students in your class often play with ABC toys?

# Take a look at more fun with abc books and toys

## Letters and Trains!

Nathan is 20 months old and loves when his home visitor brings fun books and toys with which to play. Nathan's favorite thing right now is trains. His home visitor shows him a new book about trains. Each page has a train and the first letter of that kind of train or train car on every page. The two join Nathan's mom on the couch. They take turns pointing out the trains, talking about where they have seen trains before, and saying some of the letters out loud. Nathan's mom reports to the home visitor that she and her son often look at books that same way. Nathan remembers more of the letters each time. This lets Nathan's home visitor know he is enjoying and learning from these kinds of activities.



## ABC Book Activities

Cathy provides the toddlers in her class lots of opportunities to look at and talk about the alphabet. She adds new ABC books with different themes and appearances to the book corner regularly. The children enjoy selecting the books for shared reading. Cathy and her toddlers look at the colorful pictures and talk about what they see. Cathy emphasizes the initial sounds of the pictures' names. They trace each letter with their fingers and sometimes try to "draw" it in the air while they say it. They also talk about the beginning letters of their names. Cathy knows her toddlers enjoy these activities because they often bring the alphabet books to her to be read.

## Touch-and-Feel ABCs

Lizbeth wants to make books accessible to all the toddlers in her inclusive class. In addition to regular books, she provides touch-and-feel books as well as oversized board books with tabbed pages. These adaptations make enjoying books easier for children with sensory impairments or trouble with fine motor skills like page turning. Lizbeth also has her class construct their own alphabet book. The children glue fabric and paper with different textures onto letters she draws on the pages. When the pages dry, they bind their book together. The children take turns touching, finger tracing, and talking about the letters they have made.

