

Especially for practitioners working with young children! 

Reading Together Out Loud

Storytelling and Listening

Long before a child reads independently, he is able to engage in shared book reading with an adult, which will expand his vocabulary and interest in books. This practice guide includes strategies that strengthen these emergent literacy skills.

What is the practice?

Toddlers learn the principles of reading when they listen to, look at, and talk about the story in a book. This practice helps expand toddlers' listening and speaking skills by encouraging them, through your questions, to engage in a conversation with you about the story.

What does the practice look like?

When a toddler approaches you with his favorite book, it creates an opportunity to "read" together. As the story is read, stop frequently and ask the child *wh-* questions (*Who? What? When? Where? Why?*) about the pictures or story to encourage him to talk about what he sees in the pictures or understands about the story. Ask *wh-* questions like "What do you see in the picture?" or "Where do you think the three bears will look next?" that will prompt him to talk. Be patient while he tells you about his ideas.



How do you do the practice?

There are many opportunities for sharing books with a toddler. Think about the activities the toddler is involved in and when having his favorite books available might create an opportunity to read.

- Start by identifying which books are the toddlers' favorites. Toddlers often have one or two favorite books you can have available, but don't hesitate to have some new books about things they like. Also remember to dig out books that are "old favorites" to read again. The more excited your child is about the book, the more he will learn from the reading experience.
- If you are working with a toddler in a day care center or with a parent as a home visitor, start by asking the toddler which book he wants to read, or show him two books and let him choose.
- Ask the toddler to tell you what the story is about if it is a familiar one. If it is a new book, look at the pictures with him and then ask what he thinks the book is about.
- As you "read," let the child hold the book 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 the child to talk with you about the story. Asking questions like "What do you think will happen next?" or "Why is the little girl crying?" will encourage the toddler to give you more than one-word answers. Asking questions beginning with *who?* and *what?* encourages children to talk more than asking yes-or-no questions like "Is the dog brown?"
- Show your interest in what the toddler says by following up his answer with another question. For example, "Do 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 the toddler able to describe more about the stories or pictures?
- Does the toddler want to "read" books with you?
- Does the toddler want to try new stories that you suggest?

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 looking through each book 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 her, "What do you think is the name of the little girl?" or "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. Ira's dad talks with his home visitor about getting ready for bed, snuggling with his son, and asking Ira which of his favorite books he would like to hear. They talk about the importance of following Ira's lead. Following up Ira's answer with a related question is a good idea. 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 he 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. When Dexter tells his mom which book he wants, the home visitor begins by suggesting that his mom ask him questions like "What is this book about?" Since it is a book he enjoys, 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 and only prompting if Dexter can't find an answer.

