Shared Storybook Reading

Building Young Children’s Language & Emergent Literacy Skills

by

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Appendix B

General Reading Strategies

These strategies have been shown by researchers to be useful for accelerating children’s early language and literacy achievements. Some or all of these reminders could be incorporated into instructional material for a home reading program or in periodic newsletters to parents.

Have fun during shared reading.
Make shared reading an enjoyable experience for children. Adults should be warm, responsive, and sensitive to their children during the reading experience. Resist the temptation to be overly directive throughout the activity.

Follow the child’s lead.
When reading with children, focus on the child’s object of attention. Parents are reminded to resist the temptation to continually follow their own interests rather than their child’s. Children are more likely to attend longer and engage in conversation when the topic is of interest to them.

Repeat children’s utterances.
When reading with young children, repeat what they say. This confirms children’s verbal participation in the reading interaction and provides an adult model of their own verbalizations. By repeating
what children say, parents follow the child’s lead and focus on his or her object of attention.

**Extend children’s utterances.**

In extending children’s utterances, the parent provides a language model that is slightly advanced of the child’s own production. In an extension, the parent repeats what the child says and adds just a little more grammatical or semantic information. When a child says “Fish,” the parent can extend this by saying, “It’s a big fish,” “Yes, this is blue fish,” or “That fish looks hungry!” Any information may be added; these examples are simply suggestions.

**Balance questions and comments.**

Providing both questions and comments keeps shared reading more balanced for children. Often parents reading with children ask too many questions, resulting in an imbalance in the amount and type of participation by the child. Parents can ask questions, but they can also make general observations and comments to share their own thoughts and feelings about the story.

**Pause to let the child respond.**

It is common for parents to expect young children to respond immediately when taking a conversational turn. Often parents fail to pause long enough for their children to make a comment or provide an answer. Pausing after making comments, asking questions, or reading the text on a page gives children time to process the story, make connections between book events and their own lives, and, if desired, share their own feelings and questions about the content. As a general guideline, pause at least 5 seconds for your child to take a conversational turn; pause even longer if your child has limited language abilities.

**Share the book.**

During shared reading, allow children to claim ownership of the activity by permitting them to choose the books and to turn the pages during reading. Allowing children to set the pace, turn the pages, and predict what might happen makes them active participants in shared reading.
Talk about print.

When reading with children, talk about the print in the storybook. Point to the print, track the print, ask questions about the print, comment about the print, and show children that print is an interesting part of the storybook—even as interesting as the pictures.

Elaborate on new words.

Stop and talk about words that are new or unfamiliar to the child. Ask the child to repeat the word and explain what it means. Also, link the word’s meaning to the story. Use the word four or five times during the conversation to increase the child’s familiarity with how the word sounds so it may be recognized when it is heard again.

Choose interesting books.

Choose storybooks that are interesting and motivating to the child. Also, give children opportunities to select their own books for shared-reading sessions. Try to read a variety of books. Have conversations about how the stories relate to experiences in children’s lives.

Read the same books over and over.

Children enjoy reading the same books over and over—sometimes in a single reading session and sometimes over a period of weeks, months, or years. To learn new words and concepts, children will benefit from repeated exposure. Repeated reading of storybooks provides children with this exposure in a predictable, familiar, and entertaining context.
Reading storybooks with young children is one of the most important things adults can do to support early language and literacy skills. What other fun, engaging interaction can teach children so many critical concepts -- including print awareness, vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, and social and conversational skills-- all at once? Making the most of shared reading is the goal of this practical guide, ideal for early childhood educators in preschool, Head Start, and child care programs.