

How to share books and talk together

Babies love to communicate. They are born sociable and come into the world with a willingness to communicate and learn. Their experiences in their early years shape their future social, communication and learning skills.

Books can be a great way to help babies during this period of discovery.

Seventy-five per cent of brain development occurs in the first two years of life and babies need stimulation and attention to make the most of this opportunity. This is not as daunting as it may first sound as stimulation comes from simple, everyday activities such as talking, listening, singing and sharing books together.

A language-rich home helps a child to develop in many ways. Talking and reading to babies helps them learn to listen, and gives them the chance to respond and be listened to. Over time, their coos, babbles and smiles will move on to words and sentences. Engaging with them, and what they are looking at and interested in, helps this natural process along.

Storytelling and book-reading are an easy way to have regular talking time. Storytelling introduces new words, structure and language patterns that help form the building blocks for reading and writing skills. Reading aloud combines the benefits of talking, listening and storytelling within a single activity and gets parents and carers talking regularly to young children.

Reading to children on a daily basis gives them the best start to life. It is never too early to start communicating.



About this guide

This guide is a tool for parents and practitioners to encourage communication between parents, carers and young children through book sharing. Books are a great tool for getting parents and carers talking to young children. Regular talking is one of the best ways to help develop speaking and listening skills from a young age.

Reading can help to break down some of the barriers to communication between parents and young children. Some parents say that:

- They don't know what to say to babies and young children
- They don't want to look foolish, as they don't see other people talking to babies
- They think that babies do not understand what is being said

Babies and young children do understand when they are being talked and read to and they respond in many ways, by cooing, babbling and smiling. Talking to babies encourages them to find their own way of communicating and stimulates brain development. However, some parents and carers feel inhibited, foolish or shy. Books give them something to talk about, and can be a great way of overcoming these barriers, getting parents and carers talking to babies and young children.

This guide includes:

- Information on why reading is good for talking
- A handout for parents on sharing books – 2 pages to photocopy
- Reading and talking activity ideas
- Other sources of information and resources

If you would like more information or have any comments on this guide please contact us on:

Bookstart
Booktrust
www.bookstart.org.uk

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Why reading is good for talking

- Sharing books with babies and young children is a fun way to share talk. Adults and children will both enjoy the experience, which means there is a strong chance it will become a regular activity.
- Talking and listening to young children develops their social and literacy skills and reading aloud is a good way of encouraging two-way communication.
- Babies love the sound of their parents' voices and reading aloud to them can be calming during times of distress or unease. Coupled with the appearance of their favourite book and/or character, it can be a very soothing experience and help build the bond between carer and child.
- Books introduce children to the exciting world of stories and help them learn to express their own thoughts and emotions.
- Stories provide parents and carers with a structure to help them talk aloud to children and listen to their responses. It helps overcome adult inhibitions and provides topics for discussion.
- Reading together gives babies and young children the chance to respond. A gurgle in anticipation of a favourite story ending, or a smile of enjoyment, shows parents and carers that young children like to communicate and do so from a very young age.
- Characters, words and sounds discovered through books can be talked about outside of reading time. Books are an important source of new vocabulary.
- Songs and rhymes are especially good for children as the rhythms and repetitive language make it easier for babies to learn language skills.
- Reading aloud combines the benefits of talking, listening and storytelling within a single activity and helps to build the foundation for language development.
- The majority of brain development occurs in the first three years of a child's life. Reading to babies and young children, and giving them time to respond, will help make the most of this opportunity.

Tips for parents

Sharing books and talking together

Sharing books with babies and young children is a great way of helping them learn to talk, and a wonderful opportunity to share a cuddle at the same time.

- If you are at home, find a quiet place and turn off the TV or radio. This will help your child to listen without distraction.
- There are many talking time opportunities throughout the day and reading can be a regular part of this. Try and keep a book in your bag at all times. Reading together can help a long journey or waiting time pass quickly and enjoyably.
- Your baby will recognise and enjoy the sound of your voice. At times of distress reading can be very calming, particularly when your voice is coupled with her favourite book or character.
- Be slow and clear when you read and don't be afraid to use sing-song or funny voices for characters, or for words or phrases that are repeated throughout the book. After reading a book several times, your baby will anticipate hearing the change in tone and may well show this with a smile, widening of the eyes or a wiggle.
- Don't be embarrassed or shy about using different voices or tones. Your baby will be an enchanted audience.
- You can use props, such as puppets or a favourite cuddly toy, to help bring the words alive and add actions to your words. It all adds to the appeal of spending talking time together.



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Tips for parents

- Give your child time to respond to your chatter. This could be with a babble, arm waving or gentle finger movement. Listening shows how interested you are in hearing what she has to say and encourages her in her natural discovery of communication.
- As well as reading the story, talk about the pictures. Pictures and book characters are a great topic of conversation during and after reading time. If there's a picture of a dog in a book, talk about a dog you know. Or if you see a dog in the park or on the street, refer back to the dog in the book: "Oh look, there is Spot/Scooby Doo/Hairy Maclary..."

"Having read to my own children since birth, I found it frustrating watching my brother's child not being read to at all.

At first it was because he was 'too young' and now it's because he 'can't concentrate', but I feel the two are linked. Had he got into the habit of listening, he might now be able to concentrate for longer. At two-and-a-half he has very poor language skills."

Mother of three, Surrey

- Don't put pressure on your child to name pictures or objects, but if he follows your words, praise him and say the words again.
 - Don't read for too long. Young children get bored easily, so little and often is best. Try regular bedtime or bathtime story sessions.
 - Let other grown-ups – grandparents, carers and older brothers and sisters – join in too. Reading aloud makes sure carers always have plenty to talk about with young children.
- It's good to share favourite books again and again. Repetition helps children to understand and remember the language they hear. It is not unusual for young children to want to hear the same book over and over.
 - Remember, you're not teaching your child to read. You learn to talk a long time before you learn to read, and book sharing is a wonderful way to help your child's language development.



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