



Stories are filled with lots of new words

Sharing books is a great way to help your child learn to read and write. But there is something just as important that you can do every day that will help children grow into becoming future readers—sharing stories through everyday conversations. Sharing stories is a bridge between speaking and reading that begins in infancy and continues throughout childhood.

Sharing stories is a way to build vocabulary, improve language skills and develop the love of learning. These are the foundations of reading and writing well (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999).

Sharing stories is a simple way to use everyday moments with children to respond to their curiosity and interest in the people, things and events that fill their world. Like sharing books, sharing stories with children takes advantage of the fact that knowledge and love for reading develop through social experiences—the relationships children have with caring adults in their lives. The good news about this valuable tool for building literacy is that it just takes two—you and your child—and every parent can do it every day.



From a picture comes a story

"Honey, do you know who that is? That's Grammy when she was a little girl!"

Your daughter looks surprised. She asks, "Grammy's horse?"

"Yes, that's Grammy's horse Dakota."

"I like horses," your child says.

"Grammy likes horses, too. Dakota was Grammy's favorite horse. She raised her from a baby horse. She brushed her every day and fed her every day and when she was big enough, she rode her every day. What do you think it would feel like to ride a horse?"

"Big, but fun. Mommy ride with me?"

Sharing stories is as easy as that. The mother noticed her child's fascination with the picture and took the opportunity to tell a story based on that curiosity, using language to add to her daughter's understanding. The next time they're at the library together, they might choose a book about horses, helping the child connect oral stories with books.

Tell Me a Story!

Sharing stories helps young children and parents connect



a product of Talaris Institute™

Share stories, share smiles, share learning

Simply put, sharing stories can help your child take an important step in developing his language skills and understanding of how stories work. It is also a way of engaging with children that answers some of their questions, sparks their curiosity, and builds your relationship.

Helpful parenting tips

- ★ Keep stories and conversations fun and interesting.
- ★ Tune into your child's attention and interest. If he becomes bored or distracted, end the conversation or move on to a different subject.
- ★ Curiosity will lead children in many directions, so let them choose the subjects you discuss as much as possible. The more involved, interested, and motivated they are, the more they will enjoy shared stories.
- ★ Children love make-believe stories, especially when they get to be the star of the story.
- ★ Encourage your child's imagination by using open-ended conversation starters, such as, "I wonder what it would feel like to be a frog and live on a lily pad?" Or try, "How do you suppose that tree got to be so big?" Open-ended questions provide a window into what the child is thinking and feeling and open up dialogue.
- ★ Language is an important learning tool, so surround children with dialogue. Invite children into your conversation, even if it is just mom and dad recounting their day at work.
- ★ Be creative. Learning about language and stories can take many forms, such as retelling a favorite story, singing together, reciting a favorite rhyme, or even telling knock-knock jokes.
- ★ Be a good role model. Just as reading in front of a child sets a good example, so does having enjoyable and meaningful conversations with other adults.

**For more information on parenting and early learning,
or to order copies of this Spotlight, visit www.ParentingCounts.org.**

References:

- Bergin, C. (2001).** The parent-child relationship during beginning reading. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 33(4), 681-706.
- Burns, M. S., Griffin, P., & Snow, C. E. (Eds.). (1999).** Starting out right: A guide to promoting children's reading success. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Gray, J. W. (1997).** Story re-visions: Tales for the future. In *Visionquest: Journeys toward visual literacy. Selected readings from the annual conference of the international visual literacy association* (pp. 291-295). Cheyenne, WY.
- Phillips, L. (1999).** The role of storytelling in early literacy development. Retrieved March 2006 from <http://www.australianstorytelling.org.au/txt/childhd.php>.
- Ryan, S. A. (2000).** The value of early literacy and parental involvement. Unpublished Master's thesis, Biola University, La Mirada, CA.
- Thomas, J. L., & Loring, R. M. (1983).** *Motivating children and young adults to read - 2*. Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press.

What interests your child?

Does he like dinosaurs, baseball, trucks, ballet, flowers, or seashells? Follow your child's lead as he explores the world around him. Discovering what motivates your child is important in helping your child to become a future reader (Thomas & Loring, 1983).

One thing children are always interested in is themselves! Having a starring role in a story is sure to keep your child's attention. You can use make-believe stories or simply tell a story about your child's day. "Once upon a time there was a boy named Daniel. He loved to climb and he was a very good climber. One day he went to the park with his Dad and they spent all afternoon climbing on the big toy and sliding down the slides. Daniel also loves to climb on Dad!"

Even babies love stories

Even the youngest children can be the star of shared stories. As you change your baby's diaper, have a "conversation" with her about what the two of you are doing. "Tasha is kicking her foot. Look at that foot move up and down! I wonder if Mommy can catch that little foot." Even though your infant can't yet participate in this conversation by talking, you can encourage her to participate by taking turns just as you would with an older child—stopping and letting her respond with smiles, giggles or eye contact with you.

Everyday conversations are little stories

Questions are the child's way of asking the parent for an answer that makes sense on the child's level (Gray, 1997). In other words, some answers to a child's question can turn into stories and encourage further conversation and others do not. Let's say you're in the kitchen cooking and your preschooler wanders in and asks, "What are you doing Mom?" If you say, "Just cookin", the conversation might stop there. But if you answer, "I'm chopping up the lettuce for our salad. What else do you think we could put in the salad?", then you're inviting your child to continue the conversation.

Here's another example of starting a conversation:

"Why do we have to go to bed?" a three-year-old asks.

Mommy responds, "Well, one reason is that our bodies get tired and we have to rest them so we can be strong and healthy. Why else do you think we have to go to bed?"

Her toddler adds, "Because you have to be asleep to have dreams."

"You are right! What do you dream about?" Mommy asks with a smile.



At home with sharing stories

Your home is a great place to share stories and conversations with your child. Infants and toddlers are curious about everything that goes on around them. Talking about a dream your child had, a play date, or what happened at daycare builds language skills and helps him understand how things work. By sharing a story, you are teaching your child how to listen and how to ask questions. These are important building blocks of literacy that can also shape a child's attitude toward reading later in life (Burns et al., 1999).

Children also benefit when they see parents sharing stories with each other (Burns et al., 1999). Hearing dinner table conversations in which each parent shares the events of their day with each other exposes young children to even more examples of shared stories. Parents are role models for their children in the literacy process. When children observe their parents sharing stories they will imitate what they see (Bergin, 2001; Burns et al., 1999).

