

Sharing Stories, Songs and Books

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StoryQUEST's Vision: High-quality early relationships and experiences throughout their daily routines provide each infant and toddler with the tools and skills to build a strong foundation for future school readiness. Families, caregivers, and communities as a whole collaborate to enable all children to become highly competent in language and literacy. This series was developed as part of a national research project — StoryQUEST — through the California Institute on Human Services, Sonoma State University.

Learn to share stories, songs and books as a way to help your child's literacy development. This is the third publication in a series of nine.

Tell Us a Story

Language and literacy begin with sharing stories, songs, and books. When telling a story, you can talk about:

- Yourself
- The child and her/his experiences
- What the child did today, yesterday or is going to do tomorrow
- The child's family
- Books or magazines you've read
- Programs you've seen on television
- Movies you've seen
- Events at work
- Stories your elders told you

Storytelling Strategies

- Remember that telling stories is about sharing emotions, images, ideas, or events.
- Exaggerate your facial expressions and tone of voice — children find stories much more interesting when you are animated.
- Tell a quick short story. Your stories don't have to be long and detailed, just tell a few sentences about what happened today.
- Keep **all** the children involved by responding to each one's verbal and facial responses and invite them to join in on the story either through imitating the characters or repeating words in the story
- When reading for one child, allow the child to deviate from the story or the page by making up his or her own story or adding to it.

- Make the story interesting by elaborating and even exaggerating the details.
- Use props — your children's toys, items in the environment or the car or the grocery store. Even your own fingers can help you tell the story.

Read Us a Story

The following are strategies to help make the experience more fun and less stressful:

- Determine where everyone will sit.
- Choose a book with lots of pictures.
- "Tell" the story rather than just reading words.
- Repeat or emphasize rhyming sounds.
- Incorporate turn-taking strategies.
- Use the CAR strategy — Comment, Ask, Respond.
- Be sure to include strategies to challenge each of the children. Levels of questions and comments can range from naming things in pictures to thinking about the future:
 - Name or pointing to pictures
 - Describe what's happening
- Name characteristics (bigger, smaller, red, fast).
- Allow the child to complete a sentence based on a pattern ("What do you see? I see a blue horse ____.")
- Ask the child to remember what happened before this page.
- Ask the child what is happening in the picture
- Make judgments ("How do you think he felt when that happened?")
- Make comparisons ("The rabbit is faster than the turtle.")
- Make predictions ("What do you think will happen next?")

(Adapted from Blank, Rose, & Berlin, 1978, by van Kleeck et al, 1997.)

Sing Us a Song

Watch the children's cues. Waving arms, kicking feet, bobbing heads — all the ways children communicate “This is fun! I like doing this!” As you respond to children's cues, it encourages them to continue trying to participate in the action and communicate with you.

Let toddlers fill in the blanks in familiar songs. (“This old man, he played ____”). Filling in the blanks supports the child's listening skills, vocabulary, and turn-taking.

Use the tune for a familiar song such as “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” and make up your own song about daily routines, such as eating breakfast or going to the grocery store or a song about feelings.

Make Up Actions

Use gestures. If a song doesn't have hand or body movements, make them up. Stomp your feet, wiggle your fingers, wave your hands! As you use movement and gestures, you make the song more interesting. The child's participation by waving arms or legs develops coordination and an understanding of symbols (waving hands/fingers down in front of my body can mean “rain”). Songs with movements and gestures also teach body awareness (where my nose is) and coordination (how to get my hands to clap), which supports the development of children's fine and gross motor skills.

Dance

Infants and toddlers who aren't walking yet like to move their bodies and enjoy having adults help them sway to the beat. Movement helps children develop gross motor movement. Experiences with moving to a beat help support pre-literacy skills of language patterns.

Sing About Activities

Make up songs about what children are doing (“I've gotta wash, wash, wash my toes. Gotta wash, wash, wash my toes.”) Singing about an activity can make it a lot more fun and often makes the activity go a lot faster. The more songs you sing, the more words you use, the greater the child's vocabulary grows.

Set a Tone

Use music to set a tone. Sing a bright song when it is time to wake up and a calming song when it is time to settle down. Both children and adults tend to respond to the beat of music — moving fast to upbeat songs and more slowly to calmer songs.

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