

Reading and storytelling with babies and children

Reading aloud and sharing stories with your child is a great way to spend time together. Reading and storytelling also helps promote language, literacy and brain development.

Why reading is important for babies and young children

Sharing stories, talking and singing every day **helps your child's development.**

You're helping your child become familiar with sounds, words, language and the value of books. This all builds your child's early literacy skills, helping her go on to read successfully later in life.

Reading stories **sparks your child's imagination**, stimulates curiosity and helps with brain development. Interesting illustrations and word patterns – such as rhymes – can get your child talking about what he's seeing and thinking, and help him understand the patterns of language.

Exploring stories also helps your child learn the difference between 'real' and 'make-believe' and might help develop her own ideas.

Reading or telling stories can also be **safe ways to explore strong emotions**, which can help your child understand change, as well as new or frightening events. Books about going to the dentist or hospital, starting at child care or making new friends will help your child learn about the world around him.

Sharing stories with your child doesn't mean you have to read.

Just by **looking at books with your child**, you can be a great storyteller and a good model for using language and books. Your child will learn by watching you hold a book the right way and seeing how you move through the book by gently turning the pages.

Reading stories with children has benefits for grown-ups too. This special time together **promotes bonding and helps to build your relationship**, laying the groundwork for your child's later social, communication and interpersonal skills.



did you know ?

Sharing books with your child plays a big part in your child successfully learning to read.



You can start reading aloud to your child as early as you like – **the earlier the better**. Your baby will love being held in your arms, listening to your voice, hearing rhyme and rhythm, and looking at pictures.

Storytelling and songs

Reading isn't the only way to create a home environment that's rich in language and literacy experiences. Telling stories and singing songs also help your child develop early literacy skills and have a lot of fun at the same time.

You might like to make up your own stories or share family stories. Your child will learn words and develop language skills from the songs, stories and conversations you share together.



Singing songs and saying rhymes together are also great, especially if your child enjoys

these activities more than reading.



Reading to your child in other languages

You can read, sing and tell stories with your child in **whatever language you feel most comfortable speaking**.

Using a language you're comfortable with helps you to communicate more easily and helps to make reading, singing and storytelling more fun for you both. Your child will still learn that words are made up of different letters, syllables and sounds, and that words usually link to the pictures on the page.

Don't worry if English isn't your child's first language. Knowing another language will actually help her learn English when she starts playgroup, kindergarten or school.

Dual-language books are a great resource, and many children's books are published in two languages. If you speak a language other than English at home, reading dual-language books with your child might also help you become more familiar with English.

Another option is to read a book aloud in English and talk about it with your child in whatever language feels most comfortable to both of you.



If you like, you can talk about the pictures in the book instead of reading the words. Could you and your child make up a story together? Do what you can and as much as you're comfortable with.

When to read, sing and tell stories with your child

Bedtime, bath time, potty time, on the train, on the bus, in the car, in the park, in the pram, in the cot, when you're in the GP's waiting room ... any time is a good time for a story! **You can make books part of your daily routine** – take them with you to share and enjoy everywhere.

Knowing when to stop can be just as important as finding the time to share a story in the first place. Pay attention to your child's reaction to the story, and stop if he's not enjoying it this time. You can always try a book, song or story at another time.

If you don't have a book, or can't make up a story on the spot, don't worry. There are many other ways you and your child can share letters, words and pictures. For example, you can look at:

- packages at home or in the supermarket, especially food packaging
- clothing – what does it say on the t-shirt? What colour is it?
- letters and notes – what do they say? Who sent them?
- signs or posters in shops, or on buses and trains – point out signs that have the same letters as your child's name
- menus – these can be fun for older children to look at and work out what they want to eat.



You could also check out our [storytelling videos](#). Let storyteller Anne E. Stewart introduce you and your child to 'Mook Mook the Owl', 'The Crocodile', 'The Old Lady and The Mosquito' and 'How the Years were Named for Animals'.

Tips for sharing books with babies and young children

- Make a routine and try to share at least one book every day. A reading chair where you're both comfortable can become part of your reading routine.
- Turn off the TV or radio, and find a quiet place to read so your child can hear your voice.

- Hold your child close or on your knee while you read, so she can see your face and the book.
- Try out funny noises and sounds – play and have fun!
- Involve your child by encouraging talk about the pictures, and by repeating familiar words and phrases.
- Visit your local library – it's free to join and borrow.
- Let your toddler choose the books when he's old enough to start asking.
- Be prepared to read favourite books over and over again!

If you have older children, they can share books with your younger children, or you can all read together. Taking turns, asking questions and listening to the answers are all **important skills** that will help your child when she starts learning to read.



Even reading for a few minutes at a time is effective – you don't always have to finish the book. As children grow, they're typically able to listen for longer.

What sort of books to read with your child

There are so many books to choose from that it can be hard to know where to start. As a broad rule, young children often enjoy books, songs and stories that have **good rhyme, rhythm and repetition**. In fact, one of the ways that children learn is through repetition and rhyme.

Consider books that are the right length for your child to reflect your child's changing interests and to keep him engaged.

For a guide to what might suit your child, you might like to look at the following articles:

- [Reading with babies from birth](#)
- [Reading with babies from 12 months](#)
- [Reading with toddlers](#)
- [Reading with preschoolers.](#)

You can also **vary the books you read**. Picture books, magazines, instruction manuals, TV guides and letters can all be interesting and engaging for your child. Arranging book swaps with friends, or at your parent group or early childhood centre, can be a good way to try new books without much expense.

Using your local library

Libraries have a lot to offer. Getting to know your local library can be a part of learning about and loving books.

You can borrow great children's books for free from your local library. This means you can have lots of books in your home for your child to explore – and it won't cost you a cent.

Taking your child to the library and letting her choose her own books can be a fun adventure. You can talk about and plan your trip to the library with your child, and get excited together. You could ask your child, for example:

- How many books will you choose?
- How many books can you find by your favourite author?
- Will you borrow books that have animals in them?
- Do you have a favourite book you'd like to borrow again?
- How many days will it be before we go to the library again?

Libraries also offer storytimes and activities for young children. Going along to these sessions is a way to help your child become familiar with the library, have fun and enjoy books and stories.

Libraries often stock [audio books](#) and dual-language books. You can listen to audio books in the car or as a family at home together. Many libraries also provide access to e-books through their websites.

Just contact your local library for more information.



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Web links

- Children's Book Council of Australia – Children's Book of the Year Awards
- Bookstart – Book Finder
- The Little Big Book Club
- National Library of Australia – Australian Libraries Gateway

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