



If It Fits

An idea-packed resource for evidence-based fun!

Weaving wonderful tales

When a child participates in shared reading time with adults, she can learn how to shift from simply listening to stories to becoming an enthusiastic storyteller!

*Eight steps **YOU** can take to help your child learn to love reading and to become a storyteller who uses expressive, colorful language*

It's important for moms, dads, and other caregivers to take a close look at the kinds of everyday learning opportunities available in their child's home, childcare classroom, and community environments to help a child learn to speak expressively while developing a love for reading. Shared reading can be done before naptime, at bedtime, while waiting for a doctor's appointment, or for your food to arrive at a restaurant! Plan on reading with your child as often as possible, at least three times a week for 5 to 15 minutes, using the following steps:

1 Follow your child's interests!

Choose something to read that is interesting to your child. Or better yet, allow your child to make the choice! Some children like pages with colorful pictures, letters of the alphabet, or numbers, while others may prefer pages with photos of favorite animals and activities or perhaps maps of water and land. If your child is interested in the material and the way it is presented, she is much more likely to talk with you about it. Remember, you do not have to read a book. A piece of mail, a menu, or a colorful billboard will do just fine!

2 Begin your shared reading time by asking "What?" questions and repeating your child's answers.

Let's imagine that you're sitting with your daughter and she has brought to you a short story about a little girl who has been given a balloon at a birthday party. Begin the shared reading time with your daughter by asking "What?" questions ("What kind of

party did the little girl go to?" and "What is the little girl looking at?"). After she responds to each "What?" question, repeat the answer she gives to you ("Yes! She went to a birthday party!" and "Great! She is looking at the balloon flying away!"). Asking this type of question and repeating your child's responses lets her know that you are interested in what she thinks about the story and that you are listening to what she wants to tell you about it.

3 Be patient . . . but offer help when needed.

It is okay to offer help if your daughter doesn't know the answer to some of the questions ("Do you think her friend is having a birthday?" and "Do you think she is looking at the balloon flying away?"), but make sure you have given her plenty of time to respond by herself first (a good rule of thumb is to count to 10 before offering help).

4 Show continued interest in what she tells you!

Always follow your child's answer to a question with at least one additional, related question ("Yes, she is at her friend's birthday party. What did she bring with her to the party?" and "Yes, she is looking at the balloon flying away. What color is the balloon?").

5 Shift from "What?" questions to "How?" and "Why?" questions.

As your daughter begins to talk more about the story, you can help her learn to express herself even more by asking open-ended questions ("What kind of cake do you think the little girl's friend had at her birthday party?" and "Why did the ▶



*Check out the Bright Ideas
on Page Two!*

little girl let the balloon fly away?”). She may not be ready to answer these types of questions the first time you read the story together; she may want to read it with you several times before she begins to talk more about it. The more familiar she is with the story, the more she may contribute to a conversation about it.

6 Keep demonstrating interest.

As you begin to ask open-ended questions, remember to keep expanding on the answers she gives you (“Yes! She wanted to see how high the balloon would fly. How high did it go?”). When you take the time to do this, your child will recognize that you are interested in her interpretation and understanding of the story. The more interest you demonstrate, the more she is likely to add

to the conversation. Also, the more new words you add to the conversation, the more her vocabulary will continue to grow.

7 Praise, praise, praise!

Remember to praise and encourage your child as often as possible when you are reading together (“Wow! You’re a wonderful storyteller!”). The more rewarded your daughter feels for her contributions to the conversation, the more likely she is to want to repeat the experience.

8 Smile, laugh, and have fun!

Always remember the golden rule of shared reading times with your child: have fun! Having fun will encourage her to read and talk with you more . . . and more . . . and more!

Bright Ideas

A Story Starring ME!

Enthrall your 2- to 3-year-old by making him the central character in picture-book stories you create together. Simple, homemade books that capture and retell events in a young child’s own life can prompt charming, absorbing, shared-reading experiences.

Building a basic book can be as simple as folding and stapling a few sheets of paper together. On each page, print a brief sentence about a funny or familiar happening in your child’s life. Topics might be snacktime preferences, adventures on a neighborhood walk, a play session with a family pet, imaginary tales about favorite toys, a visit to grandma’s house, bedtime rituals, childcare routines, fun with friends or siblings, getting dressed in the morning, snowy day activities, and more. Illustrate each page with appropriate photos of your child (snapped with instant-developing film or a digital camera) or your own drawings! High interest in these little books is guaranteed, and your young child should enjoy “reading” and discussing them with you again and again!

Bedtime Bonus!

While parents and caregivers will want to incorporate the eight steps of shared reading into many moments of a young child’s day, families often find a time of shared reading fits especially well into a little one’s bedtime routine. The last minutes before sleep overtakes him seem just

right for being close to mommy or daddy and focusing together on a comforting tale. Some picture books are especially appropriate for reading and sharing with toddlers and young children at bedtime. Librarians are happy to suggest titles and help you find books you’re sure to enjoy. They’ll range from classics like Margaret Wise Brown’s *Goodnight Moon* and Russell Hoban’s *Bedtime for Frances* to newer delights like Jane Dyer and Mem Fox’s *Time For Bed* and Mary Morgan’s *Sleep Tight, Little Mouse*. You’ll soon find your favorites!

Best Bets for Books!

Finding terrific materials for shared reading with your young child doesn’t have to involve a huge investment . . . or any money at all! Try some of these ideas for putting together an enjoyable (and very inexpensive) collection of shared-reading materials:

Free for all: Wait just a minute before you throw away that mail-order catalog or newspaper advertising insert! Children can be happily absorbed by words and pictures in a toy store’s catalog or a colorful grocery ad. Ask friends to save catalogs and illustrated magazines that you and your young child can enjoy exploring and talking about together. Some libraries sponsor magazine and/or book recycling. Library patrons place magazines and books (including children’s picture books) their family no longer needs in bins for others to “adopt” and enjoy. Of course, the library itself is a free-to-everyone resource from which you can borrow the very best in children’s picture books.

Pocket change: Try these easy-to-find sources for wonderful, lightly used picture books: yard sales, church rummage sales, thrift shops, swap meets, flea markets, and friends and relatives with children a little older than your own.

Early childhood practices recommended in this issue of *If It Fits* are based on research presented in a practice-based synthesis by P. A. Cutspec (2003). Influences of dialogic reading on the language development of toddlers. *Bridges*, 2(2). Read or download the complete synthesis and/or a user-friendly, illustrated, two-page research summary, *Bottomlines*, 2(2), by visiting our web site, www.researchtopractice.info.

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