

Parent-and-Child Shared Reading

Children ages 3-5 are ready to take an active part in shared story time. Reading picture books with your preschooler helps spark her imagination and love of stories. Great times to read are when you and your child are relaxed and able to talk with one another, such as bedtime or during everyday play times.

Watch a video of this Learning Guide

Learning Guide: Encouraging Child Participation

- Choose picture books about people and things that interest your child. To find out what your child might be interested in reading about, pay attention to his play. Notice the activities that make him smile and laugh or that he works hard at doing. For example, if he likes to help you in the kitchen, a book about cooking or food might be a good choice.
- Back-and-forth chatting between you and your child can help maintain her interest in a book. Encourage your child to make comments or ask questions about the story and pictures, and respond in a positive way.
- Pause often to ask open-ended questions. “How do you think Papa Bear knew someone had been sitting in his chair?” is an example of an open-ended question. Expand on the child’s answers, making them part of the story. Don’t worry about “right” answers.
- Preschool children will often choose the same book again and again. Read and re-read your child’s favorites. Once your child is familiar with a story, begin asking him more challenging questions. Ask questions that start with “What if?” or “What happens next?” to see where the child will take the conversation. When your child responds to your question or adds his own comments, you can bet he is interested in the story and wants to continue reading the book with you.
- Be excited about the story, even if it feels like you’ve read it a million times!
- Follow your child’s lead. If he wants to act out a scene from the story, encourage him by joining in as another character from the story.
- If a child uses pictures or a communication device, use messages that let him talk about the story. For example, program a device with words such as *turn page*, *read*, *stop*, *yes*, and *no*. Record repetitive phrases from the book onto the device so that your child can join along in the storytelling. For example, a device might be programmed to say: “Run, run, as fast as you can. You can’t catch me. I’m the Gingerbread Man!”

A Quick Peek

As he does every morning on the drive to preschool, Paco presses his nose against the car window and peppers his mamá, Rosa, with questions about the farms they pass. “This afternoon, let’s go to the library and borrow some books about farms,” suggests Rosa with a smile. Paco can’t wait to share the new picture books every evening when they return home. It’s his job to pick the first book, and soon mother and son are busily finding new things to talk and wonder about on every page.

Paco loves it when Rosa asks questions that put him right in the middle of a story, like, “If you were this farmer, what would you do with your animals?” or “Why do you think the farmer is putting the cows in the barn?” Reading together often leads to pretend play. Paco says, “Let’s go feed our chickens and hunt for eggs!” Then the mother-and-son farmers laugh and play as they enact different farm chores.



You'll know the practice is working if ...

- The child “jumps right into” the shared reading.
- The child responds to questions and shows enjoyment during shared reading.
- The child engages in back-and-forth conversation about the book/story.

For more ideas, ask an early interventionist, home visitor, teacher, therapist, or experienced parent.

[Click for lots of shared reading tips on the Book-Smart website.](#)