



TOTAL COMMUNICATION

SPEECH PATHOLOGY

Shared Book Reading



*Some simple steps to help get the most out of reading
with your child.*





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Shared Book Reading: Supporting Language, Learning, and Connection

Shared book reading is one of the most effective and enjoyable ways to support your child's language, thinking, and early literacy development. Reading together is not about finishing the book or reading every word correctly. Instead, it is about slowing down, enjoying the moment, and using books as a tool for talking, listening, and connecting.

Children learn language best through meaningful interaction with adults. Books provide a shared focus, which makes it easier to introduce new words, ideas, and ways of thinking while spending quality time together.

Why Shared Book Reading Matters

- Supports understanding and use of new vocabulary
- Builds attention, listening, and turn-taking skills
- Encourages thinking, predicting, and problem-solving
- Supports emotional understanding and empathy
- Lays foundations for later reading and writing skills
- Strengthens connection and enjoyment between adult and child.

Goals of Shared Book Reading

- Enjoy books together and build positive associations with reading
- Encourage back-and-forth interaction and conversation
- Focus on talking about the book, rather than reading every word
- Use reading as calm, one-to-one time within daily routines
- Support language development at your child's level

Choosing the Right Books

The best books are ones that capture your child's interest. A wide range of books can support language development, and different books offer different learning opportunities.

- Picture books with clear, engaging images
- Books with repetitive or predictable language
- Books with sounds, actions, or character voices
- Factual books about topics your child enjoys (e.g. animals, vehicles)
- Books with interesting or playful print (e.g. changing colours or sizes)

Asking Questions During Reading

Asking questions helps children think about what they see and hear. The goal is not to test your child, but to invite them into the conversation.

- Use question words such as 'who', 'what', 'when', 'where', 'why', and 'how'



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- Wonder aloud (e.g. “I wonder what might happen next?”)
- Ask about characters’ thoughts and feelings
- Pause to give your child time to respond
- Praise effort and gently rephrase or expand responses when needed

Supporting New and Unfamiliar Words

Books expose children to words they may not hear in everyday conversation. These unfamiliar words are important for building a rich vocabulary.

- Point out interesting or unfamiliar words
- Explain the word using simple, clear language
- Relate new words to your child’s own experiences
- Repeat new words multiple times across the book
- Avoid simplifying book language; instead, explain richer vocabulary

For example: “Anna was eager to see her friend. Eager means she really wanted to see her friend. Remember when you were eager to go to the zoo?”

Connecting Books to Your Child’s Experiences

Making links between the book and your child’s real-life experiences helps deepen understanding and supports memory.

- Talk about similarities between events in the book and your child’s life
- Share personal stories related to the book
- Encourage your child to talk about their own experiences
- Use everyday moments to revisit ideas from books

For example: “The lion shakes water off his mane. This is like when I wash our dog and he shakes water everywhere!”

Talking About Print and Early Literacy

Talking about print helps children understand how books and written language work. This supports early literacy development long before children begin formal reading.

- Point to words as you read
- Talk about the title, cover, and author
- Notice big or colourful writing and symbols
- Encourage your child to notice letters or familiar words
- Use repetitive books to help children join in



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Expanding and Modelling Language

One of the most powerful strategies during shared reading is expansion. This means repeating what your child says and adding a little more information.

- Repeat your child's words and add one extra word
- Add describing words, actions, or feelings
- Extend sentences using joining words such as 'because', 'and', 'but', or 'while'
- Model slightly longer sentences than your child is using

Example:

Child: "The duck is in the water."

Adult: "Yes, the duck is splashing in the water."

Child: "He's eating the chicken."

Adult: "Yes, he's eating the chicken because he is very hungry."

Following Your Child's Lead

Shared reading works best when adults follow the child's interests. It is okay to skip pages, reread favourite sections, or talk more about the pictures than the words.

- Let your child choose the book when possible
- Talk about what your child is looking at
- Respond to your child's comments and questions
- Keep reading relaxed and pressure-free

Making Shared Reading Part of Everyday Life

Shared reading does not need to be long to be effective. Short, regular reading times can have a big impact.

- Read at bedtime, after dinner, or during quiet moments
- Keep books accessible around the home
- Re-read favourite books often
- Use books as a calming or connecting activity

Most importantly, keep shared reading enjoyable. Your warmth, interest, and responsiveness matter far more than finishing the book or reading every word.