

Stories and Songs

Why is it important?

Exposure to a variety of books and music plays a role in children's development of communication skills. Children also learn to associate these activities with pleasure, as times spent enjoying books or songs are often times of shared interaction with others. It is important to share activities with children at an appropriate level by following their lead. Allow children to physically manipulate the book/music and interact, so they become active participants.

How do I do it?

Strategies that can be used to encourage interaction during stories and songs include:

Add Symbols:

Make stories and songs highly visible by adding symbols right in books or by adding pictures to songs. These symbols/pictures point out main concepts and allow children to comment or ask questions. Point to the words or symbols as you read.

Add Props:

Props help children attend and make learning more concrete. Props can be real items (e.g., a brush to accompany the song "*This is the way we...*"), pretend items (e.g., plastic animals to accompany the story "*The Old Woman Who Swallowed a Fly*") or made-up items (e.g., props made of enlarged symbols and foam backing to accompany the song "*Old MacDonald*").

Selection of Stories and Songs (choice-making):

Allow children to choose the story /song that they most enjoy. Choices can be made using any selection method (e.g., pointing, eye-gaze, picture exchange). Choices may be organized on a story / song board constructed out of Bristol board with a Velcro strip added. Symbols can then be attached to the choice board via the Velcro. Song verses/refrains should be visually depicted in a left to right format (singing to read).

Initiate Conversation:

Symbols can represent topic starters such as *"My favourite book is Mortimer. What's yours?"* *"Hey! Let's sing. I can pick the song,"* allow children to initiate conversation on topics that interest them. They also provide the opportunity for multiple turns in the conversation.

Repetitive Reading/Singing:

Stories and songs become more familiar and predictable, as they are read/sung again and again. Children's level of understanding increases with each repetition. Repetitive lines (e.g., *"Mortimer...Be Quiet!"*) allow children multiple opportunities to participate and to respond independently with familiar lines. Pause and wait expectantly (approximately 10 seconds) for children to respond. Reinforce responses or model a response if children do not respond.

Active Participation:

Involve children in physically manipulating the book/props for a song. "Page fluffers" can be added to books to make them easier to turn. Paper clips, potato chip bag clips, Popsicle sticks or dabs of glue from a hot glue gun can all be used to separate pages. Props can be made the appropriate size to be easily grasped and attached to a book/song board by Velcro.

Positioning:

Stands can be used to secure books while reading and free up hands to assist in positioning children. Bookstands can be made out of foam wedges or wood. To secure the book, Velcro can be added to the stand and to the back of the book so that pictures and words can face children at all times. As well the reader's hands are free to point to the symbols/words as they read.

Talk:

Talk about the story and relate it to real-life experiences that children will understand (*"Remember when..."*). Talk about what happens in the story or predict what might happen.

Relax and Have Fun!

Books and songs are not just for learning; they are for enjoyment as well. So relax and have fun.

Something to Try:

Choose your child's favourite storybook or song. Use one (or more) of the ideas listed above to adapt the book or song. Try reading the adapted story or singing the song with your child.

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