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Sharing Stories, Songs and Books

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Third in a series of nine fact sheets developed through a national research project — StoryQUEST — through the California Institute on Human Services, Sonoma State University.

StoryQUEST's Vision

High-quality early relationships and experiences throughout their daily routines provide each infant and toddler with the tools and skills to build a strong foundation for future school readiness. Families, caregivers and communities as a whole collaborate to enable all children to become highly competent in language and literacy.

Tell Us a Story!

Language and literacy begin with sharing stories, songs and books. When telling a story, you can talk about:

- Yourself
- The child and her/his experiences
- What the child did today, yesterday or is going to do tomorrow
- The child's family
- Things you've read
- Things you've seen on television
- Movies you've seen
- Things that happen to you at work
- Stories your elders told you

Storytelling Strategies

Remember that telling stories is about sharing emotions, images, ideas or events.

Exaggerate your facial expressions and tone of voice — children find stories much more interesting when you are animated.

Tell a quick short story. Your stories don't have to be long and detailed, just tell a few sentences about what happened today.

Keep **all** the children involved by responding to each one's verbal and facial responses.

When reading for one child, allow the child to deviate from the story or the page by making up his or her own story or adding to it.

Make the story interesting by elaborating and even exaggerating the details.

Use props — your children's toys, things in the environment, items in the car or the grocery store, even your own fingers can help you tell the story.

Read Us a Story!

The following are strategies to help make the experience more fun and less stressful:

- Determine where everyone will sit.
- Choose a book with lots of pictures.
- "Tell" the story rather than just reading words.
- Repeat or emphasize rhyming sounds.
- Incorporate turn-taking strategies.
- Use the CAR strategy — Comment, Ask, Respond.
- Be sure to include strategies to challenge each of the children. Levels of questions and comments can range from naming things in pictures to thinking about the future:
  - Naming or pointing to pictures
  - Describing what's happening
- Naming characteristics (bigger, smaller, red, fast)
- Allowing the child to complete a sentence based on a pattern ("What do you see? I see a blue horse ____")
- Asking the child to remember what happened before this page
- Asking the child what is happening in the picture
- Making judgments ("How do you think he felt when that happened?")
- Making comparisons ("The rabbit is faster than the turtle.")
- Making predictions ("What do you think will happen next?")

(Adapted from Blank, Rose, & Berlin, 1978, by van Kleek et al, 1997.)

Sing Us a Song

Watch the children's cues. Waving arms, kicking feet, bobbing heads — all are ways children communicate: "This is fun! I like doing this!" As you respond to children's cues, it encourages them to continue to try to participate and communicate with you.

Let toddlers fill in the blanks in familiar songs. ("This old man, he played ____"). Filling in the blanks supports the child's listening skills, vocabulary, and turn-taking.

Use the tune for a familiar song such as "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" and make up your own song about daily routines, such as eating breakfast or going to the grocery store or a song about feelings.

Make Up Actions

Use gestures. If a song doesn't have hand or body movements, make them up. Stomp your feet, wiggle your fingers, wave your hands! As you use movement and gestures, you make the song more interesting. The child's participation by waving arms or legs develops coordination and an understanding of symbols (waving hands/fingers down in front of my body can mean "rain"). Songs with movements and gestures also teach body awareness (where my nose is) and coordination (how to get my hands to clap).

Dance

Infants and toddlers who aren't walking yet like to move their bodies and enjoy having adults help them sway to the beat. Movement helps children develop gross motor movement. Experiences with moving to a beat help support pre-literacy skills of language patterns.

Sing About Activities

Make up songs about what children are doing ("I've gotta wash, wash, wash my toes. Gotta wash, wash, wash my toes."). Singing about an activity can make it a lot more fun and often makes the activity go a lot faster. The more songs you sing, the more words you use, the greater the child's vocabulary grows.

Set a Tone

Use music to set a tone. Sing a bright song when it is time to wake up and a calming song when it is time to "settle down." Both children and adults tend to respond to the beat of music — moving fast to upbeat songs and more slowly to calmer songs.

StoryQUEST

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