

## **“Reading Aloud To Young Children: A How-To Guide. Don’t be afraid to sound silly.”**

**Updated Feb 20, 2017 Merete L. Kropp**

“I take my toddler to story hour at the library as often I can,” a client recently told me. “The librarian seems to know some kind of magic that makes him pay attention and he really likes it. When I try to read a book to him at home, he wriggles and squirms and we’re both bored and frustrated. He just doesn’t like reading at home and I’m not good at it so I’ve given up and I take him to the library instead.”

Does this sound familiar? I encouraged this mom to keep trying to read to her son at home by implementing the simple tricks below. Reading with small children can and should be an enjoyable activity that leads to engaging conversations and fosters a love of books, stories and establishes lifelong reading habits.

Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- **Choose books that children like.** What makes a good book? A compelling story line with vibrant, relatable characters and interesting problem and solution. Some good books have little to no plot, but are full of humorous illustrations and repetitive, rhythmic words and phrases complete with a surprising twist or unexpected ending. Good books for young children are bright and inviting, or perhaps simple and elegant with thoughtful illustrations accompanying the print. Your local children’s librarian is an excellent resource and librarians love making book recommendations!
- **Show enthusiasm.** Joy is contagious, and if an adult reader appears to enjoy the reading activity, the child will too. Establish positive anticipation for having a good time through your facial expressions and the tone of your voice as you settle into a comfortable reading position.
- **Choose a comfy spot and position yourself,** the book and your child in such a way that all eyes can see the book and fingers can reach to point to pages, pictures and print.
- **Read the pictures, not just the words.** As a competent reader, your eyes are drawn to the print. A child, however, looks to the pictures to offer meaning and clues as to what the book is about. As you read the title aloud to your child, talk about what you see pictured on the cover. As you talk about what you see and read, try to generate ideas and predictions of what the book might be about. Ask open-ended questions such as: “What do you see in this picture?” “What do you think they are doing?” “What else do you see?” “I wonder if...”
- **Continue asking open-ended, thought provoking questions as you read.** When reading to a child who does not yet talk, it is your job to both ask and answer questions. “What is that?” “It’s a cow!” “What does a cow say?” “Cows say, ‘moo, moo’” “Can you say moo, moo, moo?”
- **Don’t be afraid to sound silly.** When you use various tones of voice, inflections and articulate rhythm and rhyme into your reading, your child will be more engaged and will find the experience to be enjoyable. The rhythmic sounds of the words and the fun rhymes will help your child learn the patterns and sounds in language which will prepare him for learning to read at a later stage of development.
- **Savor each page.** Take your time. Share your own thoughts and observations as you read and look at the pictures. Intersperse your questions to your child with your own thoughts and ideas.
- **Intentionally make connections for your child.** Connect the text in the story to elements of your child’s life. “I think Frances is feeling sad. Do you feel sad sometimes? Remember that time when...”
- **Connect the text in the story to your child’s immediate environment and the world around you.** “Look – the chair in their living room looks just like ours!” “It started raining and Gerald and Piggie are getting wet just like we got wet when it started raining at the park last week!”
- **Connect the text in the story to other books you have read.** “Do you remember the book we read when the fish gave away all her colorful fins? This fish looks different from the other fishies too because of his pouty face. In both stories the other fish didn’t like the main characters at first, but at the end, all the fish love them.”

- **Check for comprehension by occasionally asking your child to retell parts of the story.** At the end of a page, you might pause and ask your child, “What just happened there? Did that surprise you?” Be sure to give your child time to think and wait to listen to his answer.
- **Explain big words in context.** If you encounter an unknown (to your child) word in a book, read the word followed by a brief explanation to help your child understand without stopping the story. “It was a (great, big) ENORMOUS strawberry!” “Her parents constantly (or all the time) said...”
- **Be responsive to your child’s attention span.** If he is not interested in the story and printed words, point out the pictures and have back and forth conversations about what you see and what the illustrations remind you of. Don’t force your very young child to sit through an entire book when he is clearly ready to move on to a new activity. Sometimes reading one or two pages of a book is sufficient for one session.
- **Reread books over and over again.** My ongoing mantra is: “A good book is like a good friend; we keep going back to revisit them again and again.” Each reading of a book might have a different focus and generate different questions and conversations. Perhaps as you read a story all the way through without stopping, you might think of questions, observations and topics of conversations to have during subsequent re-readings.

Above all, keep in mind that reading with your child should be an enjoyable activity for all participants. It should not feel like a quiz or be filled with opportunities for drill and practice. Encourage conversations and discussions, but keep the flow of the story going and remain responsive to your child’s interest and attentiveness.

Keep visiting the library to participate in story time. Watch the librarian as she reads and interacts with the children to learn more tips on reading with your child. But please, don’t give up on reading with your child at home every day.

This article was originally published on the author’s website, Nurturance.