

Reading with your young child

What does the research say?

Finding appropriate books

Picture books often have attractive illustrations, appealing narratives, entertaining situations or are full of lots of interesting information. However, for you and your child to enjoy sharing books together, it's so important to find books you both like! Visit the library, spend time reading different books with your child to find out what types of books are right for you.

Books that relate to your child's developing personal interests (e.g., trains, animals) and acquired life experiences (e.g., special events, recent activities) are often good – particularly to start conversations about what you have read (Temple et al. 2014).

Be aware that a book's genre can influence the amount and type of talk you have with your child (Nyhout & O'Neill, 2013). For example, research suggests parents use longer sentences and talk more in narrative book reading than in labeling book reading (Nyhout & O'Neill, 2013). In addition, parents are more likely to read the entire text with storybooks than information texts; however, there are often more conversations that go on around information texts (Price et al., 2009).

Teaching new words

Books are excellent way to introduce young children to new words – books introduce children to less frequent words that they make not come across in everyday conversations (Evans et al., 2011; Lennox, 2013). In addition, children's books often contain more complex sentence structures than found in normal speech (Cameron-Faulkner & Noble, 2013).

However, young children need to be explicitly taught new words – the context of the story is not enough for a child to understand the meaning of a new word. When teaching new words, try linking the word to the meaning of the story or to something the child has experienced – these are better ways to teach new words than simply repeating the word or providing a more familiar alternative word (Korat et al., 2016).

Reading the same storybook repeatedly also helps your young child learn words and increases their vocabulary (Williams et al., 2014). Also, sleep promotes word learning – sleep is a powerful aid in memory consolidation (Williams et al., 2014). Therefore, a bedtime story is the perfect way to end a day!

The benefits of shared book reading are not just in what you read, but how you read – lots of conversations around the book are important, as is encouraging your child to talk too. The Scottish Book Trust have created a resource for research-informed practices for shared book reading, which you can find on our website.