



Using books to support language development

Books are a great way to support language development. Books often include words that we don't get to hear in everyday conversation which also means that they can open up different discussions for families. They're a great way to engage children and support overall learning – especially language and literacy development.

When sharing books with children, explaining new words and talking about the story will help support language development. Some of the predicting factors of literacy rates include a child's receptive and expressive vocabulary. Receptive vocabulary is the words that children understand and expressive vocabulary is the words that children say.

In addition to encouraging families to make books part of their everyday life, you can also support families to understand different ways of sharing books. How we share books with children can have a massive impact on their language and literacy development – and also support a love of books and reading.

A model for book-sharing: CROWD and PEER

The CROWD and PEER framework are part of dialogic book sharing which was developed by Dr Grover Whitehurst. Dialogic reading is a technique for book sharing that includes parents and children as partners in the telling of the story. It's an interactive method based around building children's oral communication and thinking skills. The CROWD and PEER models have been proven to have a positive impact on children's expressive and receptive vocabulary and also on their thinking and reasoning skills. The adult plays a strong role by explaining and expanding on the story and encouraging conversation with the child.

This model is most successful when children and adults are familiar with the story. It's a good idea to familiarise yourself with the book beforehand and for the first read through with children to have minimal interruptions. You don't have to read the book through word for word.

These strategies can be adapted depending on the age of the children.

PEER

- **Prompt:** Ask a question or say something and give the child time to respond. The CROWD model can help you form different kind of questions. It's best to ask questions that require more than a 'yes or no' answer.
- **Evaluate:** Acknowledge the child's response. It's important to take on board their feedback and thoughts.
- **Expand:** The adult should take the child's answer and add a bit more to it.



- **Repeat:** Prompt the child again and ask them to repeat what you said to help ensure they understand.

CROWD

- **Completion prompts:** Ask the child to finish your sentence.
- **Recall prompts:** Ask the child to tell you about an event from the story. This works well after you've read the story. You can ask the child to re-tell parts of it in their own words.
- **Open-ended prompts:** These work best when you're looking at the pictures. You might be able to ask the child what is happening in a picture or what they would do if they were in the character shoes.
- **Wh- prompts:** It's best if these have a specific focus of helping the child develop their understanding. They don't always have to be open-ended, and closed questions are fine too.
- **Distancing:** This involves linking an element of the book to the child's experience or interests. This step is important because it gives books even more importance and helps children connect elements of the story to their experiences. Think about connecting children with an emotion, an object or an experience.

General tips

- It's very important to follow the child's interests. Children will be more engaged and receptive to the activities if it's a book they're enjoying.
- If a child isn't enjoying a particular book, or doesn't connect with the story, it's okay to try for a different one.
- It's also important to read and re-read. Repetition is key and every time the child enjoys the same book, they'll be deepening their understanding. Children also take comfort in their familiar favourites.
- These techniques can also be applied to conversations. Using these strategies will help children feel listened to and valued.
- Babies love talking about their favourite stories too. You can still use the basic principles above with babies. If you're having a conversation, give them lots of time to answer and praise their coos and babbles as a response. Link objects in the books to their world or experience, chat about what you see in the pictures and point to different objects.