

READ, SING & TELL STORIES



"If you want your children to be smart, tell them stories. If you want them to be brilliant, tell them more stories."

Albert Einstein



EARLY LANGUAGE IS THE BEST PREDICTOR OF SCHOOL READINESS

Language development begins before birth. Research underscores the importance of children's earliest experiences with language as the foundation for learning across domains. Invest in children's earliest experiences to put children on a trajectory for academic success and lifelong learning.



HIGH-QUALITY LANGUAGE ENVIRONMENTS ARE CRITICAL

All children must be exposed to rich language environments for successful language development. However, quality is more important than quantity. Research shows that adults can improve the language environments they provide for children when they have support. Recognize parents, caregivers, and early learning providers as sources of high-quality language for young children.



READ, SING AND TELL STORIES WITH CHILDREN

Research demonstrates that children who engage in high-quality reading, singing, and storytelling experiences build knowledge across domains, from language and cognition to social and emotional skills. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends participating in these activities from birth. Provide opportunities for young children to experience these forms of playful learning.

THE RESEARCH: READ, SING & TELL STORIES

Children's earliest experiences with language build an important foundation for later communication skills. **Proficient reading in third grade is the biggest single predictor of high school graduation.**¹ However, the pathway to literacy begins early. Infants' ability to distinguish between sounds in their native language is not only related to their vocabulary as toddlers, but also predicts their reading readiness as they enter school.²

Children learn language best through their interactions with other people. **The quality of language that children are exposed to is more important than the quantity of words they hear.**³ A high-quality language experience refers to hearing a large variety of words in back-and-forth interactions with adults. For infants and toddlers, this also includes parentese, the sing-song tone of voice commonly used with infants. The slower speed and exaggerated vowel sounds help infants recognize key language elements. Adults can learn to engage in high-quality language interactions with children, and research demonstrates that all adults can improve these skills with support.⁴

Reading books together advances social and emotional, math, and critical thinking skills, and encourages high-quality interactions between caregivers and children. Even infants benefit for shared book reading; **the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that parents read to children from birth.**⁵ When adults ask children open-ended questions that go beyond the text and connect the content to real life - a practice called dialogic reading - it increases children's story comprehension and bolsters emergent literacy skills.⁶

Early music experiences also promote language and literacy skills. Singing with children supports early literacy by **building phonological awareness - or the ability to recognize and manipulate language sounds - through rhymes and repeating patterns.** Yet, the benefits of music in early childhood go beyond language; when infants listen and bounce along to music with a regular beat, as in a waltz, they build pattern recognition skills.⁷ Singing and other musical experiences also encourage physical activity and support motor development.

Storytelling is a powerful strategy for supporting children's early learning. **Through stories, adults share culture, tradition, and history with children.** By hearing and telling stories, children gain experience with narrative elements, such as characters, setting, and plot. These are key literacy skills. One study found that when children act out a story after they listen to it, they remember it better.⁸ Similarly, children who have regular opportunities to create, narrate, and perform stories, gain school readiness skills across domains.⁹

RESOURCES & REFERENCES

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