

How Storytimes for Preschool Children Can Incorporate Current Research

Ellen Fader

Public libraries have been presenting fun and interactive storytimes for many years, engaging children and helping them love books and libraries. These programs typically include a combination of short and long books, music and action rhymes. Children are surrounded with stimulating speech and interesting topics, creating a language and literacy experience beneficial to children's development. These storytimes model for parents how to read enthusiastically and involve their children in books. Parents observe their children's interest and excitement and enjoy together what library staff presents. These programs have excelled in developing a child's print motivation, an important emergent literacy building block.

Recent research in the field of emergent literacy has led to the development of new best practices for public libraries that want to help parents and teachers of preschool children get ready to read. Storytimes that incorporate these practices differ in subtle ways from the storytimes described above; however, building in the early literacy information does not change the basic nature of these programs. Storytimes continue to present the quality characteristics listed above but also contain some additional information for parents and caregivers concerning the reasons and rewards for reading to children. Library staff who present age-specific storytimes, from babies to preschoolers, can add short, instructive phrases to help adults who are present understand how children are benefiting from the activities and to show them ways they can facilitate children's literacy development. In this way, the library helps to increase parents' and caregivers' skills in developing narrative skills, vocabulary, letter knowledge and phonological sensitivity, in addition to print motivation.

For example, during storytime for babies, the storyteller might tell parents, "Did you know that hearing language actually changes the structure of babies' brains? Language builds more connections between neurons in the brain. So the more you talk with your baby, the more connections she will have in her brain." Also: "Sometimes reading looks like chewing. That's okay because he's learning to feel comfortable with books. Babies who play with book will find it easier to learn to read later on."

During a storytime for toddlers, the storyteller might add, "Toddlers are learning about nine new words a day; books are a wonderful source for this growing vocabulary!" Also: "Toddlers understand many more words than they say, so be sure to talk to them all day long about what you are doing and about what they are doing."

In storytime, library staff will also demonstrate specific techniques that facilitate emergent literacy, since how adults read to preschoolers is as important as how frequently children listen to stories. For example, librarians will occasionally model dialogic reading by asking questions in a toddler group so that the child becomes the teller of the story. Because a central basis for learning to read is understanding that words are made up of smaller sounds, librarians will play language games in preschool storytime to demonstrate for parents how to encourage phonological or phonemic

awareness. Parents and caregivers will learn how to have fun with phonemes by having children complete the rhymes in songs, such as “Down by the Bay”. To encourage narrative skills and to help children learn sequence, the storyteller will occasionally recap a story: “First it started to rain, then the puppy played in the mud puddle, then she got all dirty, and had to get a bath!”

An important thing to remember is that storytime will still be fun if these techniques are used judiciously: some in every program but not every technique with every book. Researchers say that children learn more from books when they are actively involved. All children will benefit from the additional effort to incorporate early literacy information into all age-specific storytimes, but the changes will not be “directive” or “instructional” – just more fun!

**Storytime Programs Based on Research
From Public Library Association and
National Institute of Child Health and Human Development's
Early Literacy Initiative**

Early-Talkers: Birth to Two Year Olds

It is the responsibility of the library staff to communicate to parents/caregivers their key role with their children in early literacy development, including providing information and the tools to assist them in this role.

What is emergent literacy?

Emergent literacy is what children know about reading and writing before they can actually read or write. Young children's emergent literacy skills are the building blocks for later reading and writing. Children learn these skills before they start school, beginning in infancy. From birth throughout the preschool years, children develop knowledge of spoken language, the sounds that form words, letters, writing, and books. This is the beginning of the abilities that children need to be able to learn to read and write in school.

Research Says	What Parents/Caregivers Can Do	Application to Storytimes♦
<p>Parents are the best "teachers" to get their children ready for learning to read</p> <p>Children who are read to 3 times a week or more do much better in later development than children who are read to less than 3 times a week.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young children often have short attention spans but enjoy repeating favorite activities. Parents/caregivers can share these activities frequently for short amounts of time throughout the day. • Parents/caregivers know their children well and can take advantage of when their child is in the "mood". • Emergent literacy is what children learn about reading and writing before they learn to read and write. Children learn these skills before they start school. • Share books with your children as often as possible. • Share a book with your baby every day. Even just a few minutes is important. • If your child loses interest, try another time. • Visit the library on a regular basis. • Ask the library staff to suggest ways to share books with your children. • Ask the library staff to suggest good books to share with your children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate to parents/caregivers: the importance of reading to their children at least 3 times a week that they are the best teachers to get their children ready to read because young children often have short attention spans but enjoy repeating favorite activities. Parents/caregivers can share these activities frequently for short amounts of time throughout the day. that they are the best teachers to get their children ready to read because they know their children well and can take advantage of when their child is in the "mood". • When sharing/reading books explain that books with few or no words and that have simple but interesting pictures are good choices • The younger the child, the more distinct the pictures must be, sharp contrast and clear • Provide books suggestions through booklists/handouts; explain that every board book is not necessarily appropriate for an infant. • Display a variety of books/cassettes/cds appropriate for the parent/caregiver to share with the under-two-year-old • Provide ways (for ex. handouts) for parent/caregiver to continue early literacy activities at home

<p>Vocabulary is knowing the names of things. It is an extremely important skill to have when they are learning to read. Vocabulary begins to develop at birth and continues to grow throughout the child's life.</p> <p>By 12 to 18 months of age, most children begin to talk, and most two-year-olds have vocabularies of 300 to 500 words. Children enter school knowing between 3,000 and 5,000 words.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to your baby or toddler about what is going on in the environment • Describe what your baby is seeing or doing • Show your baby or toddler things and talk about them • Use sensory-rich, descriptive language, adding adjectives to enrich vocabulary • Use speech that is simple and clear • Encourage babbling and other early attempts at communicating by your baby or toddler • When you speak, leave time for your child to "talk" back • Share books with your baby or toddler frequently • Make the book sharing experience a positive interaction; if it is not, try another time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use these guidelines in your storytime and explain to parents/caregivers the importance of expanding vocabulary: Use specific vocabulary for concrete objects—car, van, truck; fingers, arm, elbow, shoulder. <p>Make connections between concepts and vocabulary; give words tangible experiences; for concrete objects, for actions, for emotions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model book sharing as part of storytime • Incorporate book sharing between parent/caregiver and child as part of the storytime program; • Use realia to help baby expand vocabulary and to begin the understanding that words/pictures represent real things <p>Communicate this information to parents/caregivers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share a book with your baby every day. Even a few minutes is important. • Make book sharing a positive experience Share books when parent/caregiver and child are in a good mood <p>Hold child in lap, show baby the book and use an exciting voice</p> <p>Talk and have fun. Touch and love your baby the whole time</p> <p>Watch what your baby does. Let your baby play with the book.</p> <p>Stop for a while if your baby gets upset</p>
<p>Print motivation is a child's interest in and enjoyment of books. A child with good print motivation enjoys being read to, plays with books, pretends to write, asks to be read to, and likes trips to the library.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make book sharing a special time for closeness between you and your baby or toddler • Let your baby or toddler see that you enjoy reading • Point out signs in the environment • Make visits to the library on a regular basis and make them fun outings. • Attend programs for you and your baby or toddler 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share the <u>enjoyment</u> of reading, using books or big books • Have parents/caregivers join in as you read or repeat after you. • Assure parents/caregivers that it is all right for babies to play with books; they are exploring. Books can be put in toy box; if on a shelf have them cover out • If program is presented outside the library encourage attendees to visit the library; going to the library supports a child's interest in and enjoyment of books. Consider providing an incentive. <p>(continues next page)</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate with parents/caregivers: Share books when parent/caregiver and child are in a good mood. Positive interactions around books will lead to more regular and frequent book sharing experiences. Conversely, negative interactions make the young child less interested in books and reading. • Have words to rhymes and songs written out so parents/caregivers can follow and children can see. Point to text from time to time as you say the words. • Spend a few minutes of each program having each child and parent/caregiver share a book together. • List of books that are good choices available as a handout.
<p>*Phonological sensitivity is the ability to hear and manipulate the smaller sounds in words</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Say nursery rhymes and other rhymes to baby or toddler • Sing with baby/toddler • Play music for your baby/toddler • Repeat rhymes and songs so baby/toddler becomes familiar with them and can imitate you 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use nursery rhymes/rhymes, fingerplays, songs and music in storytimes • Communicate to parents/caregivers the importance of rhymes, songs, and music in language development. In addition to being fun: <p style="margin-left: 40px;">Rhyming is the beginning of understanding that words are made up of smaller parts</p> <p style="margin-left: 40px;">Songs and music helps children with rhythm and with breaking words into syllables</p>

- ◆ All examples will not be used in every storytime
- * Added at this level by Montgomery County (MD) Public Libraries

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**Storytime Programs Based on Research
From Public Library Association and
National Institute of Child Health and Human Development's
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Talkers: Two And Three Year Olds

It is the responsibility of the library staff to communicate to parents/caregivers their key role with their children in early literacy development, including providing information and the tools to assist them in this role.

What is emergent literacy?

Emergent literacy is what children know about reading and writing before they can actually read or write. Young children's emergent literacy skills are the building blocks for later reading and writing. Children learn these skills before they start school, beginning in infancy. From birth throughout the preschool years, children develop knowledge of spoken language, the sounds that form words, letters, writing, and books. This is the beginning of the abilities that children need to be able to learn to read and write in school.

Research Says	What Parents/Caregivers Can Do	Application to Storytime♦
<p>Talkers age grouping is for 2 and 3 year olds (at least 50 words active vocabulary)</p> <p>Parents are the best "teachers" to get their children ready for learning to read</p> <p>Children who are read to 3 times a week or more do much better in later development than children who are read to less than 3 times a week.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young children often have short attention spans but enjoy repeating favorite activities. Parents/caregivers can share these activities frequently for short amounts of time throughout the day. • Parents/caregivers know their children well and can take advantage of when their child is in the "mood". • Emergent literacy is what children learn about reading and writing before they learn to read and write. Children learn these skills before they start school. • Share books/read with your children as often as possible. • Share a book with your child every day. Even just a few minutes is important. • If your child loses interest, try another time. • Encourage child when s/he pretends to read • Visit the library on a regular basis. • Ask the library staff to suggest ways to share books with your children. • Ask the library staff to suggest good books to share with your children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider grouping two-year-olds and three-year-olds together • Communicate to parents/caregivers: the importance of reading to their children at least 3 times a week <p>that they are the best teachers to get their children ready to read because young children often have short attention spans but enjoy repeating favorite activities. Parents/caregivers can share these activities frequently for short amounts of time throughout the day.</p> <p>that they are the best teachers to get their children ready to read because they know their children well and can take advantage of when their child is in the "mood".</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When sharing/reading books explain characteristics of books that work well for this age. • Provide books suggestions through booklists/handouts <p style="text-align: right;">(continues next page)</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Display a variety of books/cassettes/cds appropriate for the parent/caregiver to share with the child • Display books you have shared in storytime. It is more likely that books read in storytime will be re-read at home. • Provide ways (for ex. handouts) for parent/caregiver to continue early literacy activities at home
<p>Vocabulary is knowing the names of things. It is an extremely important skill to have when they are learning to read. Vocabulary begins to develop at birth and continues to grow throughout the child's life.</p> <p>By 12 to 18 months of age, most children begin to talk, and most two-year-olds have vocabularies of 300 to 500 words. Children enter school knowing between 3,000 and 5,000 words.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share books/read with your child often; books often expose children to things outside their familiar environment • Ask your child about the book you are reading together, instead of just having the child listen to you reading the story • Ask your child questions about the pictures; questions s/he must answer with more speaking than pointing or that can be answered with just yes or no • Ask your child to take turns with you in telling about the pages of a picture book that the child knows well • Make the book sharing experience a positive interaction; if it is not, try another time • Use sensory-rich, descriptive language, adding adjectives to enrich vocabulary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use these guidelines in your storytime and explain to parents/caregivers the importance of expanding vocabulary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use specific vocabulary for concrete objects--car, van, truck; different names for adult and baby animals Give words tangible experiences; words have meaning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To concrete objects, to actions, to emotions • Choose books that will expand the vocabulary of the children; can discuss unfamiliar words before sharing the book or use a familiar word following the unfamiliar one • Have children repeat words that may not be familiar, in a fun way or as a game • Have children join in saying repeated phrases in books • Explain dialogic (hear and say) reading and have some portion of the program devoted to this type of book sharing.
<p>Print awareness includes learning that writing in English follows basic rules such as Flows from top to bottom and left to right</p> <p>That the print on the page is what is being read by someone who knows how to read</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using a book that the child knows well, child points to words as adult reads those words • Share books/read with your child often • Have your child turn the pages • Ask your child about the book you are reading together, instead of just having the child listen to you reading the story • Ask your child questions about the pictures • Ask your child to take turns with you in telling about the pages of a picture book that the child knows well • Point out signs in the environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have words to rhymes and songs written out so adults can follow and children can see. Point to text from time to time as you say the words • Each time a book is opened make a point of holding up the book and showing the cover. Open the book as it is facing the children, not facing the librarian. State and talk about the title of the book and the author. • From time to time point to the text as you say the words; we are reading the words, not the pictures • Nametags: write out name as child says it; spell it or have them spell it if they offer

<p>Narrative skills include being able to understand and tell stories and being able to describe things. They are important for children in order for them to be able to understand what they are learning to read.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents/caregivers can encourage narrative skills by encouraging child to recount events in order, for example what happened at a birthday party or on a trip to McDonald's. • Parents/caregivers should encourage child to tell you about things that the child has done that have a regular sequence to them; for example, the steps involved in eating breakfast. • Parents/caregivers can use books that have a sequence that is easy for the child to follow. When the book has been read together many times, the child should try to tell the story in sequence. • When reading together, parent/caregiver should ask what questions and then open-ended questions to expand language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reads story without much interruption so that children hear entire sequence; helps them learn story structure • Choose some fingerplays or stories that are cumulative or sequential. Repeat them so that children can say what comes next. • Choose at least one story that is cumulative or sequential. Re-read the story with the children saying what comes next. • Before reading a book talk about it or theme and allow children to relate it to their experiences • Give children opportunity to respond orally to simple questions about story and/or pictures, but do not force them to speak • Use props, flannel board, etc. for children to retell a story • Explain/demonstrate dialogic (hear and say) reading and have some portion of the program devoted to this type of book sharing. • Provide handout related to "hear and say" reading
<p>Letter knowledge includes learning that letters are different from each other, that each letter has a name, and that specific sounds go with specific letters. Example: child's ability to tell the name of the letter B and the sound it makes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents/caregivers can point out and name letters in alphabet books, picture books or on signs and labels. • Help your child write and read his/her name and other familiar words using magnetic letters, crayons or pencil and paper 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use nametags to help children understand letters—write their name as you spell it to them; let them spell their names for you as you write them; if nametag written ahead of time, let them choose their names from several nametags • Use an alphabet activity such as the ones below: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ---Use song like BINGO or other songs or rhymes that name letters ---Use alphabet book and point to letter as say name of letter; let children join in
<p>*Phonological sensitivity is the ability to hear and manipulate the smaller sounds in words</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Say nursery rhymes and other rhymes and do fingerplays with child • Sing with your child • Play music for your child • Repeat rhymes and songs so child becomes familiar with them and say them him/herself • Play rhyming word games, using silly words too 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use nursery rhymes/rhymes, fingerplays, songs and music in storytimes • Use books that rhyme • Play rhyming game • Communicate to parents/caregivers the importance of rhymes, songs, and music in language development. In addition to being fun: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rhyming is the beginning of understanding that words are made up of smaller parts Songs and music helps children with rhythm and with breaking words into syllables

<p>Print motivation is a child's interest in and enjoyment of books. A child with good print motivation enjoys being read to, plays with books, pretends to write, asks to be read to, and likes trips to the library.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make shared book reading a special time for closeness between you and your child • Encourage your child when s/he pretends to read • Let your child see that you enjoy reading • Make visits to the library on a regular basis and make them fun outings. • Attend programs for you and your child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share the <u>enjoyment</u> of reading, using books or big books • Have parents/caregivers join in as you read or repeat after you. • If program is presented outside the library encourage attendees to visit the library; going to the library supports a child's interest in and enjoyment of books. Consider providing an incentive. • Communicate with parents/caregivers: Share books when parent/caregiver and child are in a good mood. Positive interactions around books will lead to more regular and frequent book sharing experiences. Conversely, negative interactions make the young child less interested in books and reading. • Have words to rhymes and songs written out so s can follow and children can see. Point to text from time to time. • Explain dialogic (hear and say) reading and have some portion of the program devoted to this type of book sharing. • List of books that are good choices should be available as a handout. • Provide ways (for ex. handout) that extends activities to the home.
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- Added at this level by Montgomery County (MD) Public Libraries

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**Storytime Programs Based on Research
From Public Library Association and
National Institute of Child Health and Human Development's
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Pre-Readers: 4 and 5 Year Olds

It is the responsibility of the library staff to communicate to parents/caregivers their key role with their children in early literacy development, including providing information and the tools to assist them in this role.

What is emergent literacy?

Emergent literacy is what children know about reading and writing before they can actually read or write. Young children's emergent literacy skills are the building blocks for later reading and writing. Children learn these skills before they start school, beginning in infancy. From birth throughout the preschool years, children develop knowledge of spoken language, the sounds that form words, letters, writing, and books. This is the beginning of the abilities that children need to be able to learn to read and write in school.

Research Says	What Parents/Caregivers Can Do	Application to Storytime♦
<p>Parents are the best "teachers" to get their children ready for learning to read</p> <p>Children who are read to 3 times a week or more do much better in later development than children who are read to less than 3 times a week.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young children often have short attention spans but enjoy repeating favorite activities. Parents/caregivers can share these activities frequently for short amounts of time throughout the day. • Parents/caregivers know their children well and can take advantage of when their child is in the "mood". • Emergent literacy is what children learn about reading and writing before they learn to read and write. Children learn these skills before they start school. • Share books/read with your children as often as possible. • Share a book with your child every day. Even just a few minutes is important. • If your child loses interest, try another time. • Encourage your child when s/he pretends to read • Visit the library on a regular basis. • Ask the library staff to suggest ways to share books with your children. • Ask the library staff to suggest good books to share with your children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate to parents/caregivers: the importance of reading to their children at least 3 times a week <p>that they are the best teachers to get their children ready to read because young children often have short attention spans but enjoy repeating favorite activities.</p> <p>that they can share these activities frequently for short amounts of time throughout the day.</p> <p>that they are the best teachers to get their children ready to read because they know their children well and can take advantage of when their child is in the "mood".</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When sharing/reading books explain characteristics of books that work well for this age. • Provide books suggestions through booklists/handouts • Display a variety of books/cassettes/cds appropriate for the parent/caregiver to share with the child <p style="text-align: right;">(continues next page)</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Display books you have shared in storytime. It is more likely that books read in storytime will be re-read at home. • Provide ways (for ex. handouts) for parent/caregiver to continue early literacy activities at home
<p>Phonological sensitivity is the ability to hear and manipulate the smaller sounds in words. Most children who have difficulty in reading have trouble in phonological sensitivity.</p> <p>Ability to say whether or not two words rhyme</p> <p>Ability to say words with sounds or word chunks left out</p> <p>Ability to put two word chunks together to make a word</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play word games <ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Do two words rhyme --Say words with pause between syllables and have child guess the word --Categorize words by their first sound --Make up "silly" words by changing the first sound in a word --Say words with chunks of sound left out, for ex. "say bat without "buh" --Put two parts of word together to made a word, like "cow" and "boy" • Relate sounds to child's personal interests and his/her name • What words start same as child's name • Say rhymes, do fingerplays with child • Read nursery rhymes and poetry with your child • Play music for your child • Sing songs together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include books and songs that rhyme • Include song(s) in storytime to help children hear syllables • Include music and rhythm to help children listen to distinct sounds/syllables • Read stories with alliteration • Play rhyming game <p>Communicate to parents/caregivers the importance of rhymes, songs, and music in language development. In addition to being fun:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of being able to break down words into parts as a skill for reading; being able to rhyme supports this skill • Demonstrate a game that emphasizes phonological sensitivity • Importance of rhyme through books that rhyme, poetry • Importance of rhymes, fingerplays, songs and music as fun ways to help children with phonological sensitivity • Songs and music helps children with rhythm and with breaking words into syllables
<p>Vocabulary is knowing the names of things. It is an extremely important skill to have when they are learning to read. Vocabulary begins to develop at birth and continues to grow throughout the child's life. Most children enter school knowing between 3,000 and 5,000 words.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read/share books with your child often; books often expose children to things outside their familiar environment • Ask your child about the book you are reading together, instead of just having the child listen to you reading the story • Ask your child open-ended questions about the pictures; questions s/he must answer with more speaking than pointing or that can be answered with just yes or no • Ask your child to take turns with you in telling about the pages of a picture book that the child knows well • Use sensory-rich, descriptive language, adding adjectives to enrich vocabulary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use these guidelines in your storytime and explain to parents/caregivers the importance of expanding vocabulary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use specific vocabulary for concrete objects Give words tangible experiences; words have meaning To concrete objects, to actions, to emotions Use sensory-rich, descriptive language, adding adjectives to enrich vocabulary • Choose books that will expand the vocabulary of the children; can discuss unfamiliar words before sharing the book or use a familiar word following the unfamiliar one • Talk about book before reading it, giving children an opportunity to talk, using some open-ended questions

		<p>(continues next page)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have children repeat words that may not be familiar, in a fun way or as a game • Choose books that will expand the vocabulary of the children. Some words are used more in written form than in spoken form. • Allow time for children to speak, but do not force them to • Have children join in saying repeated phrases in books
<p>Print awareness includes learning that writing in English follows basic rules such as</p> <p>Flows from top to bottom and left to right</p> <p>That the print on the page is what is being read by someone who knows how to read</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps child recognize own name • Points out signs • Share books/read with your child often • Parent/caregiver lets child point to words in a book that the child is familiar with while parent/caregiver reads the words • Follows text with finger from time to time • When child tells you an incident or story, write it down using the child's words • Point out signs in the environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have words to rhymes and songs written out so adults can follow and children can see. Point to text from time to time as you say the words • Each time a book is opened make a point of holding up the book and showing the cover. Open the book as it is facing the children, not facing the librarian. State the title of the book and the author. • From time to time point to the text as you say the words, especially if word(s) are repeated • Nametags: write out name as child says it; spell it as you write it • Communicate to parents/caregivers ways they can support print awareness with their children (see column 2)
<p>Narrative skills include being able to understand and tell stories and being able to describe things. They are important for children in order for them to be able to understand what they are learning to read.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents/caregivers can encourage narrative skills by encouraging child to recount events in order, for example what happened at a birthday party or on a trip to McDonald's • Parents/caregivers should encourage child to tell you about things that the child has done that have a regular sequence to them; for example, the steps involved in eating breakfast • Parents/caregivers can use books that have a sequence that is easy for the child to follow. When the book has been read together many times, the child can try to tell the story in sequence • When child recounts an incident or story, write it down using the child's words • Use objects for children to tell stories • Talk with children using open-ended questions, not questions that can be answered by pointing or by yes or no 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reads story without much interruption so that children hear entire sequence; helps them learn story structure • Choose some fingerplays or stories that are cumulative or sequential. Repeat them so that children can say what comes next. • Choose at least one story that is cumulative or sequential. Re-read the story with the children saying what comes next. • Before reading a book talk about it or theme and allow children to relate it to their experiences • Give children opportunity to respond orally to simple questions about story and/or pictures, but do not force them to speak • Encourage children to predict what might happen before or during reading book. • Use props, flannel board, etc. for children to retell a story • Allow time for children to relate story to own experiences • Use props, flannel board for children to retell a story • Use creative dramatics as a means for children to retell story <p>Communicate to parents/caregivers ways they can encourage narrative skills (see column 2)</p>

<p>Letter knowledge includes learning that letters are different from each other, that each letter has a name, and that specific sounds go with specific letters. Example: child's ability to tell the name of the letter B and the sound it makes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents/caregivers can point out and name letters in alphabet books, picture books or on signs and labels. • Help your child write and read his/her name and other familiar words using magnetic letters, crayons or pencil and paper, writing in sand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include enjoyable alphabet book in storytime, naming the letter and the sound it makes • Include song like BINGO or others that name letters • Allow children who can to write their own nametags; when appropriate let child spell name as you write it • Have foam or magnetic letters available for play • Communicate with parents/caregivers fun ways that they can support letter knowledge with their children; offer handouts/books
<p>Print motivation is a child's interest in and enjoyment of books. A child with good print motivation enjoys being read to, plays with books, pretends to write, asks to be read to, and likes trips to the library.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make shared book reading a special time for closeness between you and your child • Encourage your child when s/he pretends to read • Let your child see that you enjoy reading • Make visits to the library on a regular basis and make them fun outings. Attend programs for you and your child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share the <u>enjoyment</u> of reading, using books or big books • Have parents/caregivers join in as you read or repeat after you. • If program is presented outside the library encourage attendees to visit the library; going to the library supports a child's interest in and enjoyment of books. Consider providing an incentive. • Communicate with parents/caregivers: Share books when parent/caregiver and child are in a good mood. <p>Positive interactions around books will lead to more regular and frequent book sharing experiences. Conversely, negative interactions make the young child less interested in books and reading.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have words to rhymes and songs written out so s can follow and children can see. Point to text from time to time • Provide handout that extends activities to the home

◆ All examples will not be used in every storytime

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Research on Early Literacy

According to the 1991 Carnegie Foundation report, *Ready to Learn, A Mandate for the Nation*, 35% of children in the United States enter public schools with such low levels of the skills and motivation that are needed as starting points in our current educational system that they are at substantial risk for early academic difficulties.

This problem, which is usually placed under the rubric of school readiness, is strongly linked to family income. The National Assessment of Educational Progress has documented substantial differences in the reading and writing ability of children as a function of the economic level of their parents. For example, among African-American and Hispanic students in the U.S. (two groups who experience disproportionate rates of poverty) the percentages of Grade 4 students reading below the basic level are 64% and 60%, respectively (National Center for Educational Statistics).

The relationship between the skills with which children enter school and their later academic performance is strikingly stable. For instance, research has shown that there is nearly a 90% probability that a child will remain a poor reader at the end of the fourth grade if the child is a poor reader at the end of the first grade. Further, knowledge of alphabet letters at entry into kindergarten is a strong predictor of reading ability in 10th grade. Putting together these and many other findings, we see that school achievement co-varies with family income and social class. Social class differences in children's academic skills exist at the very beginning of school, and individual differences in school performance are stable from kindergarten to high school. There is tragedy in these facts because children's lives depend on success in school. Children who start school behind and typically stay behind. Their lives are at risk.

But the story begins well before school entry. We know that there are large social class differences in children's exposure to experiences that might support the development of emergent literacy precursors to academic success. For instance, research has shown that mothers from lower income groups engage in less shared picturebook reading and produce fewer teaching behaviors during shared reading than mothers from middle-class groups. One study found that 47% of public-aid parents reported no alphabet books in the home, in contrast with only 3% of professional parents reporting the absence of such books. By one estimate the typical middle-class child enters first grade with 1,000 to 1,700 hours of one-on-one picture book reading, whereas a child from a low-income family averages just 25 hours. Such experiential differences are clearly important in accounting for differences in academic outcomes and point to the importance of adopting approaches in the preschool period that prevent later difficulties in reading, writing, and other tasks of formal schooling.

Background Research: Bonding with Babies Through Books

Learning to read and write is essential for school success. Children who read early and well read a lot more than children who are slow to learn to read, or who are having reading difficulties. As a result, successful readers become smarter, not just about how to read, but also about all those things that can be learned from books. In contrast, children who lag behind in reading receive less practice in reading than other children, miss out on opportunities to develop strategies for understanding what they read, often encounter reading material that is too hard, and may come to dislike reading and school assignments that require reading.

Several studies point to a relationship between shared book reading and the emotional development of young children. For instance, Bus & vanIjzendoorn (1997) found that infant-mother responding during shared book reading was affected by the attachment status of infants, with mothers of less securely attached infants engaging in more discipline during shared reading than mothers of infants who were securely attached. In a study with older preschoolers, Bus & vanIjzendoorn (1995) found that less securely attached mother-child pairs engaged in less shared book reading than securely attached mother-child pairs.

Interestingly, age at which shared reading begins has consistently been shown to be a strong predictor of individual differences in young children's language abilities. For instance, Payne, Whitehurst, & Angell (1994) found a significant correlation between reported age of onset of shared reading and language scores at four years of age. Moreover, the age at which parents started to read to their child is associated with their child's interest in and enjoyment of reading activities. In turn, a child's interest in reading activities is an important predictor of his or her later reading achievement.

The goals of the Bonding with Baby program are twofold. First, this program aims to introduce book sharing between parents and their infants at an earlier age than it might otherwise occur, consistent with the research that shows that age of onset of shared reading is important. A second goal of this program is to have parents and their infants experience interactions around books as pleasurable, consistent with the research that shows that a strong, positive bond between mother and infant leads not only to positive experiences around books, but also to a higher frequency of such interactions. Thus, by increasing the degree to which mothers and infants experience book sharing as pleasurable, the Bonding with Baby program also aims to increase the frequency and regularity with which book sharing occurs. Furthermore, when the affective experience of book sharing is positive, mothers are more inclined to initiate interactions around pictures, and infants are more likely to remain interested and to respond to their mothers. Thus, a positive social-emotional climate can also lead to more optimal learning experiences during book sharing.

The Bonding with Baby picture books are filled with colorful images of interactions between parents and babies. The training video provides information for parents about sharing books with their infants, with advice on how to pick the best time to share a book, how to get baby's attention, and how to talk about the pictures. Research by Whitehurst (2000) has shown that the Bonding with Baby intervention increases the frequency of book sharing and the pleasure that parents and infants derive from the experience. The size of these effects ranged between moderate and large and were consistent across a variety of measures.

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Background Research: Dialogic Reading for Two- and Three-Year-Olds

Over a third of children in the U.S. enter school unprepared to learn. They lack the vocabulary, sentence structure, and other basic skills that are required to do well in school. Children who start behind generally stay behind--they drop out, they turn off. Their lives are at risk.

Why are so many children deficient in the skills that are critical to school readiness? Children's experience with books plays an important role. Many children enter school with thousands of hours of experience with books. Their homes contain hundreds of picture books. They see their parents and brothers and sisters reading for pleasure. Other children enter school with fewer than 25 hours of shared book reading. There are few, if any, children's books in their homes. Their parents and siblings aren't readers.

Picture book reading provides children with many of the skills that are necessary for school readiness: vocabulary, sound structure, the meaning of print, the structure of stories and language, sustained attention, the pleasure of learning, and on and on. Preschoolers need food, shelter, love; they also need the nourishment of books.

It is important to read frequently with preschoolers. Children who are read to three times per week or more do much better in later development than children who are read to less than three times per week.

How we read to preschoolers is as important as how frequently we read to them. Researchers have developed a method of reading to preschoolers called Dialogic Reading. When most adults share a book with a preschooler, they read and the child listens. In dialogic reading, the adult helps the child become the teller of the story. The adult becomes the listener, the questioner, the audience for the child. No one can learn to play the piano just by listening to someone else play. Likewise, no one can learn to read just by listening to someone else read. Children learn most from books when they are actively involved.

Dialogic reading for children who are talkers but who are not yet pre-readers (generally two and three-year-olds) is based upon three main techniques - asking "what" questions, asking open-ended questions, and expanding upon what the child says - which are designed to teach vocabulary and encourage children to tell more complete descriptions of what they see.

The goals of the program are: (1) to help parents increase the number of times they ask their child to name objects in the pictures; (2) to help parents to start using more general questions as a way of getting their children to say more than just one word at a time; and (3) to encourage pleasurable interactions around books for both parents and children.

Dialogic reading works. Children who have been read to dialogically are substantially ahead of children who have been read to traditionally on tests of language development. Children can jump ahead by several months in just a few weeks of dialogic reading.

These effects have been found with hundreds of children in areas as geographically different as New York, Tennessee, and Mexico, in settings as varied as homes, preschools, and daycare centers, and with children from economic backgrounds ranging from poverty to affluence.

Dialogic reading is just children and adults having a conversation about a book. Children will enjoy dialogic reading more than traditional reading as long as parents learn to mix-up questions with straight reading, vary what they do from reading to reading, and follow their child's interest.

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Background Research: Sound Awareness for Four- and Five-Year-Olds

Learning to read and write is essential for school success. Children who read early and well read a lot more than children who are slow to learn to read, or who are having reading difficulties. As a result, successful readers become smarter, not just about how to read, but also about all those things that can be learned from books. In contrast, children who lag behind in reading receive less practice in reading than other children, miss out on opportunities to develop strategies for understanding what they read, often encounter reading material that is too hard, and may come to dislike reading and school assignments that require reading.

Reading and writing are crucial to living and working in our society. We use these skills at the grocery store when writing a check for food, in the car when reading directions, at the bank when filling out paperwork, and at home when reading the newspaper. Many children, however, fail at the task of learning to read. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, 38% of fourth graders nationally cannot read at the basic level. In other words, they cannot read and understand a simple paragraph of the type that would be found in a children's book. In some school districts that serve large numbers of children living in poverty, the number of fourth graders who cannot read at the basic level hovers around 70%. These children seldom catch up. They enter high school with the ability to read only at an elementary school level. For many, the work becomes too difficult and they end up dropping out of high school. For those who go on to graduate, the picture is not much better. These young adults cannot participate fully in a society such as ours, where expectations for reading and writing arise in almost every daily activity. Further, they miss out on the joys of reading and are poorly prepared as parents to help their own children become ready to read.

Within the past two decades, research has identified phonological sensitivity (sometimes called "phonological awareness" or "phonemic awareness") as a central basis for learning to read. Phonological sensitivity involves understanding that words are made up of smaller sounds. These smaller sound units include individual words in compound words ("sea" and "shell" in "seashell"), syllables ("but" and "ter" in "butter"), and phonemes, which are the smallest speech sounds and are the sounds depicted by letters (the "buh" sound in "bat"). Phonological sensitivity might be revealed by a child's ability to identify words that rhyme ("What rhymes with cat?"), blend spoken syllables or letter-sounds together to form a word ("What do you get when you put 'tie' and 'ger' together?") delete syllables or a letter-sound from spoken words to form a new word ("What is 'window' without 'dow'?"), or count the number of letter-sounds in a spoken word ("How many letter sounds are there in 'milk'?" Answer = four). Children who have better phonological sensitivity as indicated by their ability to answer questions such as these learn to read quicker and better than children who have trouble with these tasks.

Well-developed phonological sensitivity promotes the development of reading because letters in written language correspond to phonemes, e.g., the letter B makes the buh sound. Understanding that words are made up of smaller sounds helps children "break the code" between written language (letters) and spoken language (sounds). Research with school-age children indicates that most poor readers have poor phonological sensitivity skills.

Children's phonological sensitivity begins to develop during the preschool years. Unless children are given help from teachers, parents, or other adults, those with low levels of phonological sensitivity will continue to be delayed in this skill from the late preschool period forward. The development of phonological sensitivity in young children progresses from sensitivity to large and meaningful units of sound (e.g., individual words within sentences or individual words within compound words), to syllables, to phonemes.

The Sound Awareness for Pre-readers program, described subsequently, consists of activities that are designed to help parents teach their children phonological sensitivity skills. The program includes language games appropriate for four- to five-year-old children.

Most programs designed to facilitate phonological sensitivity in pre-readers involve a large number of activities that span the developmental progression of phonological skills from word sensitivity to phoneme sensitivity. Such programs would be impractical for libraries to implement with parents and would likely be overly cumbersome and too involved for many parents to implement with their children (two such well-designed programs are *Ladders to Literacy* and *Phonemic Awareness in Young Children: A Classroom Curriculum*). The activities described in the Sound Awareness for Pre-readers Program, however, can be extended by advancing along the continuum of phonological sensitivity development (e.g., the "Say It Slow--Say It Fast Puzzle Game," described in the following materials, can be performed with syllables or phonemes). A description of several extension activities is provided for libraries that have the ability to offer a series of programs to the same group of parents over a several month period.

Children from families of all family backgrounds can have difficulty learning to read. However, children from low-income families are disproportionately at risk for reading difficulties. These children are more likely to be slow in the development of oral language skills, print awareness, and phonological sensitivity prior to school entry than their middle-income counterparts. As a group, children from low-income families tend to have fewer experiences with book sharing, print materials, and other experiences that foster emergent literacy skills. Thus, a library's recruiting efforts for the Sound Awareness for Pre-readers program might pay special attention to organizations and information sources that serve low-income families, while also making the program available for all families.

Although the origins of phonological sensitivity have not yet been identified completely, we know that it depends on a well-developed vocabulary. Thus the Dialogic Reading Program for Parents of Two and Three Year Olds, described elsewhere in this package of materials, may be a more appropriate starting point for a child who has been slow to develop oral language, even if the child is four years of age or older. Even though vocabulary and other oral language abilities are prerequisites to phonological sensitivity, research has indicated that the types of activities that promote vocabulary development (such as shared book reading) are different from the activities that promote phonological sensitivity. Consequently, both the vocabulary building experiences provided in the Talking and Books program and the phonological sensitivity building experiences provided in the Sound Awareness for Pre-readers program are necessary for children to be fully ready to learn to read.

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