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Sharing Books: Tips for Parents of Children With Special Health & Development Needs



Shared reading (/English/ages-stages/baby/Pages/how-to-share-books-with-your-baby.aspx)is good for all children. Reading together with your baby or child helps them develop and learn. It's also a time to build bonds and promote relational health (/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Building-Resilience/Pages/healthy-mental-and-emotional-development-in-children-key-building-blocks.aspx).

Here are reading tips for parents and caregivers of children with special health or developmental needs. These strategies can boost the benefits of sharing books if your child has speech and language delay, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), hearing or vision loss or other conditions.

Reading aloud with children who have speech & language delay

Children with speech and language delay (/English/ages-stages/toddler/Pages/language-delay.aspx)will enjoy spending time with you reading a book, even if they do not understand everything they read. Help strengthen their speech and language skills by reading to them.

Tips for reading with infants or toddlers

- Read books with words or phrases that repeat, like books with rhymes or songs.
- Keep reading the same books. The repetition helps children learn language.

Tips for reading with preschool or school-aged children

- Talk about why things happen. For example, you can ask: "Why did the monkey take the banana? Was it because the monkey was hungry?"
- Practice letter sounds. For example, point to a picture of a cat and ask, "What sound does a cat make? Does a cat say 'meow'? Can you say 'meow'?" Or ask, "What sound does *ball* start with? Buh."

Reading aloud with children who have autism spectrum disorder

Children who have autism spectrum disorder (/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Building-Resilience/Pages/healthy-mental-and-emotional-development-in-children-key-building-blocks.aspx) may have trouble focusing on the person reading to them or the pictures in a book or may not be able to understand each word. They may have trouble communicating with words or gestures or have a very short attention span. Help strengthen their social and learning skills by reading to them.

Tips for reading with toddlers

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- Read books with photos or drawings of faces to help children learn about emotions. For example, a frown may mean a person is sad.
- Try books with sounds. Many children with ASD enjoy pressing buttons that make sounds.

Tips for reading with preschool or school-aged children

- Talk about why things happen. For example, ask: "Why did the monkey take the banana? Was it because the monkey was hungry?"
- Ask about letter sounds. For example, point to a picture of a cat and ask: "What sound does a cat make? Does a cat say 'meow'?" You can ask older children, "What sound does cat start with? Kuh."

Reading aloud with children who have motor delay

Children with motor delay (/English/MotorDelay/Pages/default.aspx)may also have delayed speech, difficulty understanding what they hear, or problems sitting independently. Reading aloud can aid in children's development of motor skills, language and play (/English/family-life/power-of-play/Pages/playful-reading-tips-ways-to-engage-your-child-in-the-magic-of-books.aspx).

Tips for reading with infants or toddlers

- Use books that have thick, sturdy pages.
- Clap your hands and help your child clap along to the rhythm of the words.

Tips for reading with preschool or school-aged children

- Make sure your child can see the book. If your child is in a wheelchair or special chair, sit where the child can see the book and hear you.
- Ask therapists about special tools to help your child turn the pages.

Reading aloud with children who have vision loss

Children with vision (/English/health-issues/conditions/eyes/Pages/Vision-Screenings.aspx) loss may have trouble reading or seeing pictures on a page. Reading aloud to them can help the development of motor skills, speech, language and play. For children with limited vision, make sure there is enough light, and look for large print books.

Tips for reading with infants or toddlers

- Describe the pictures while you read the text.
- Find books that have textures, pop-ups, or raised soft shapes. Name the shapes.
- Help children with little or no sight become familiar with braille.

Tips for reading with preschool or school-aged children

- Try audiobooks that your child can start and stop.
- Gather objects mentioned in the book that your child can touch while you are reading.

Reading aloud with children who are deaf or hard of hearing

n who are deaf or hard of hearing (/English/health-issues/conditions/ear-nose-throat/Pages/Hearing-spx)may not be able to hear or understand parts of a story. They might also be unable to recognize what is on the page. Reading together blends listening, speech, language, thinking and reading.

Tips for reading with infants or toddlers

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- Make sure your child can see your face and the pictures.
- Use simple sign language while reading.

Tips for reading with preschool or school-aged children

- Make sure your child can see your face and the pictures.
- Keep teaching your child to sign.

Reading aloud with children who have ADHD

Children with short attention spans, high activity levels or ADHD (/English/health-issues/conditions/adhd/Pages/default.aspx) may be very active and have difficulty following directions, waiting or taking turns. Over time, reading aloud can strengthen speech and language skills by making reading enjoyable.

Tips for reading with toddlers

- Take breaks from reading with play.
- Keep reading for a few minutes when your child shifts their attention to something else. Your child may be listening while playing.

Tips for reading with preschool or school-aged children

- Read in a quiet area without distractions. Turn off electronic devices.

Reading aloud with children who have developmental delays

Children with developmental delays (/English/health-issues/conditions/developmental-disabilities/Pages/default.aspx) may find it difficult to sit without help, understand all the words in a story, or tell you what they see on a page. Children may point to pictures, repeat words, or let you know in other ways that they like it when you read to them.

Tips for reading with infants or toddlers

- Read books that have thick, sturdy pages.
- Read books that have bright colors, shapes and letters.

Tips for reading with preschool or school-aged children

- Read books that have buttons that make a sound when pressed or audiobooks that your child can start and stop.
- Help your child draw pictures about the book.

Remember

Sharing books with your child is a wonderful way to bond, spark joy and nurture their growth at their own pace. Even small moments of reading together help build language, imagination and connection.

More information

- How to Share Books with Your Child: Birth and Beyond (/English/ages-stages/baby/Pages/how-to-share-books-with-your-baby.aspx)

- 10 Tips to Help Your Child Fall in Love With Reading (/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/school/Pages/10-Tips-to-Help-Your-Child-Fall-in-Love-with-Reading.aspx)

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- Playful Reading Tips: 4 Ways to Engage Your Child in the Magic of Books (/English/family-life/power-of-play/Pages/playful-reading-tips-ways-to-engage-your-child-in-the-magic-of-books.aspx)
- Reach Out and Read: Resources for Parents (https://reachoutandread.org/what-we-do/resources-2/)

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