



Reading Literacy & Well-being

Reading has the power to transform lives. Not just the information gleaned, or the opportunities new knowledge offers us – but the physical act of reading itself and effect it has on our emotions.

These are just a few notes taken from the “Reading Literacy and Well-being” mini-presentation series, that focuses specifically on encouraging young readers. The presentations go into more detail about the importance of reading literacy, how we can encourage it and the role it can play in creating well-being in our children and young people.

Common Obstacles to Reading

- **Console competition.** Create a balance between screen time and other activities. Reading should not be seen as a ‘punishment’ or something they need to do to earn screen time. Find a place in your routine that allows for a range of activities.
- **Nothing I want.** Meet the child in their space. What interests them? Do they prefer books of facts rather than stories? Child-friendly biographies of favourite football players? Is there anything about their other games or interests that could give you a clue? Let THEM choose. Sometimes we inadvertently steer kids away from what they *want* to read. This is a real demotivator. Or they may be trying to say, “I need help finding something to read that’s interesting to me.”
- **I don’t have time.** Before bed (reading aids sleep readiness). Waiting for appointments. Review your family routine. Audiobooks at home or in the car. This helps with understanding the structure of a story, introduces new vocabulary and improves listening skills.
- **It feels overwhelming.** Being faced with a pile of pages can be overwhelming for some children. Short stories, fact books, choose your own adventure books are ways of offering ‘bitesize’ reading material. Try trading off pages with your child as you read aloud to each other. Use post it notes or markers to visibly break books into chunks.

- **What's the point?** Choose books that are slightly above your child's reading level and read out loud. It's not only a good bonding exercise, but also builds comprehension skills, expands vocabulary, and exposes kids to more interesting stories than they can read on their own.
- **Basic skills.** The process of learning to read isn't easy, and some kids have more trouble with reading than others. Finding out what's behind the struggle can help you support your child's reading growth. In this case you may like to talk with your child's teachers. Also consider when they last had a vision test, where they sit in the classroom and levels of background noise. Remember that everyone develops at their own pace and some children just need a little more time.
- **Too hard.** Read these harder books out loud to your child. This can help build comprehension skills, keep your child interested in more complex stories, and create positive reading experiences. Once you understand your child's level, it becomes easier to find books they can read independently.

12 Simple Tips

- **Don't leave home without it.** A book is something you can have handy. Maybe keep some in the car (though not all can read in a car). You never know when you will have a break or waiting time. Replace screen time with book time.
- **Look for a series.** If your child discovers a book in a series – you've struck gold! You might be tired of the certain characters, but if your children they aren't, then keep going. They will progress on to something else eventually. The same goes for discovering a favourite author - Roald Dahl, David Walliams, Jacqueline Wilson.
- **Reread favourites.** Some books become old friends. They can mark certain periods of our lives, give us comfort, or we notice something new when we reread them. It can build confidence to read a familiar book and find we no longer struggle with it. Also, don't be afraid to revisit books that were abandoned. Tastes change and confidence grows.
- **Word-based games.** Scrabble (or Scrabble Junior, depending on your child's level), Boggle (which can be played quickly), Junior Scategories are all fun ways to build vocabulary and have fun with words. They're also great for family bonding.

- **Share and listen.** Talk about what you are reading, why you like the book, what other books you like. Ask your child what they are reading, their thoughts and opinions (throw in some questions about feelings and actions to encourage empathic thinking). Perhaps do this while cooking dinner, for example, or engaging in an activity where you can 'just hang out'.
- **Turn on subtitles.** Research has shown that having subtitles on can improve literacy (no matter the language that is being used in the programme). We often hear a new word, but do not know it by sight.
- **Get the family involved.** Grandparents and other loved ones can help. If they cannot read with your child face-to-face, you could try sharing a story over Skype or Facetime. They could share one of their favourite stories.
- **Think about your own reading habits.** Do you read for pleasure? Let reading become something 'your family does to relax'. It can be an activity you share.
- **Environment.** Where is the reading material in your house? *Note: Not just books!* Is there somewhere comfortable and cozy that you child can read and truly relax? Do they like to read with background music or in silence?
- **Repeated oral reading.** Repeated oral reading means reading aloud, with guidance and is helpful in improving reading fluency. This type of reading means re reading texts until fluency is achieved, (on average this is around four times). This is useful particularly when it comes to challenging vocabulary – new words or subject specific or technical words they have not encountered before.
- **Silent independent reading.** Silent reading can be used to allow children to expand their knowledge, take a break, or explore new ideas. For this they do not need to read books that match their independent reading level (i.e. they can read with 95% word accuracy), but ones they are simply drawn to. Resist the urge to say, "that's too hard for you", and just let them try and explore. Hold a book, look at pictures, pick out and share facts, or be prompted to ask questions which you can then encourage them to research and answer...and simply enjoy the experience.

- **Think beyond books.** Comics, recipe books (also good for maths), graphic novels, child-friendly online blogs and sites, flyers that come through the mailbox.

Reflection, Comprehension, & Empathy

The following questions can be useful to support reading comprehension and encourage socio-emotional development in young readers.

- “Why do you think did *the character* did/said that?”
- “How do you think *the character* felt? Why?”
- “What do you think you would do if you were him/her/them?”
- Discuss the emotions in the story, or let them hear you empathising with characters in the book. This applies to fiction or nonfiction!
- “What do you think the moral of the story is and why?”
- For more advanced readers may also like to look for themes and recurring ideas within the story.
- Think beyond stereotypes. One of the beautiful things about reading is that opens us up to whole different worlds. It helps develop empathy and tolerance - the understanding that other people have their own thoughts, desires and reasons for their behaviour, and that their experiences can be very different to our own.
- Sometimes when reading aloud we deal with interruptions as children ask questions or talk over you. It can be tricky to find the balance between the flow of the story vs addressing these questions and comments. You can choose between a short answer, or say, “Let’s see what happens”, “Let’s listen and find out”. Encourage them to keep listening and work out the answers for themselves as you read along. When you have finished is the better time for a longer discussion. If questions are not answered through the text, why not look up the answers together?

Some children will be ‘chatterers’ and you will wonder if they are even listening to the story. What they are ‘listening to’ is you spending close time with them, and it is a story that has brought you together. With gentle encouragement, things can grow from there.



Some Useful Resources

There is a great array of resources online that can support readers. Below are a few popular ones, but a simple search will help you find different tools story sites. Applications, such as Book Creator, are also useful to create your own stories (or recreate old classics).

- **Story Online.** An award-winning children's literacy website, Storyline Online®, streams videos featuring celebrated actors reading children's books alongside creatively produced illustrations.
- **Free Children's Stories.** Founded in 2008, freechildrenstories.com operates on the simple principle that children's development is paramount. Their mission is to offer traditional, meaningful storytelling to every child, parent, or teacher around the globe with access to the internet, for free.
- **International Children's Digital Library.** Features books from around the world. The free site does not read the books aloud, but students can read them independently.
- **Storynory.** Storynory features a collection of original, fairy tale, and classic children's audio stories. Children can follow along with the story as it is read to them, as the text is also included on the site.

Getting readers to retell a story in their own way can be a fun way to check comprehension and draw out the story. It can show us what the child has absorbed, (and it not always what you think!)

Rewrite, draw, or act out a favourite story. Ask them to suggest alternative endings or what they think happens after the story in the book end. Applications, such as *Book Creator*, are also useful to create your own stories, (or recreate old classics).



Mobile Devices

Mobile devices and computers are a great way for us to access a wide range of material, (the sites given above are good examples). Children and young people tend to be very competent online, so you can use these skills to uncover new and interesting stories and information, or even go online to read reviews and order books!

Remember that when it comes to retaining information, it has been shown that information that read in print tends to be more easily retained. This is particularly important when children are asked to remember key information.

Sleep is vital to the physical and mental health of our children, and it is widely recommended by leading health experts that devices be left out of the bedroom. A book before bed is far more helpful in aiding sleep readiness.

Unlike mobile application, books have clear 'stopping cues' that tell us it is time to finish and go to sleep. Promoting sleep is one of the healthiest things you can do for your child.

Finally...

The most important point to remember is this: we can encourage reading by making it fun and enjoyable. Reading is a way for children to explore ideas and connect with those around them. It is a means through which children and young people can come to know themselves, understand the wider world, and help them find their place in it.



Notes & Reflection

Below are the questions from the presentation series. These are asked at the end of each section to encourage reflection on your thoughts, ideas, and practices.

What do you think is the most important part of reading literacy?

What challenges do you face when encouraging your child to read?

What techniques have worked for you? What hasn't worked? Why?

How does the use of screens affect your child's life?

Your Notes

You might like to make your own notes about additional information that is given in the mini-presentation series.

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