

# READING ALOUD TO CHILDREN

*As the twig is bent, so the tree is inclined.*

## **Making the commitment**

President Hinckley: “. . . When the tree was first planted, a piece of string would have held it against the forces of the wind. **I could have and should have supplied that string with ever so little effort**, but I did not. And it bent to the forces that came against it. **Children are like trees. When they are young, their lives can be shaped and directed, usually with ever so little effort.** Said the writer of Proverbs, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6). . . . **Let parents and children read good books together.** I feel sorry for parents who do not read to their young children. I feel sorry for children who do not learn the wonders to be found in good books, or how stimulating an experience it is to get into the mind of a great thinker as that person expresses himself or herself, with language cultivated and polished, concerning great and important issues.”

- *What is our long-term objective?*

(1) For our children to love reading now (as part of a happy, sunshiny childhood)  
(2) For our children to love reading for their whole lives (so it’s always a source of strength and joy in their lives)

- *What do we love to do?*

Things that we’re good at!

Jim Trelease, author of *The Read-Aloud Handbook* (a must-read for all parents), notes:

- The more you read, the better you get at it; the better you get at it, the more you like it; the more you like, the more you do it.
- And the more you read, the more you know; and the more you know, the smarter you grow.

The only way that our children will LOVE reading is if they are good at reading.

The only way they will become good at reading is by doing a lot of reading.

If our kids are like most kids, and if we rely mostly on the schools to do the job, our kids won’t spend a lot of time reading.

It’s up to us.

## Making the time

President Hinckley: “Begin early in exposing children to books. The mother who fails to read to her small children does a disservice to them and a disservice to herself. It takes time, yes, much of it. It takes self-discipline. It takes organizing and budgeting the minutes and hours of the day. But it will never be a bore as you watch young minds come to know characters, expressions, and ideas. Good reading can become a love affair, far more fruitful in long term effects than many other activities in which children use their time.”

- What minutes and hours of the day can I organize and budget so as to make time to read to my children?
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- Right after naptime? (Works especially well for little ones who wake up grumpy, and need to be held for a few minutes.) During a snack when the children are in their high chairs? (Squirmy children can't crawl away. Special books can't get torn. Far fewer food battles, because all are focusing on a good story.) While the toddler is using the potty? While the baby is nursing? When the child seems bent on being naughty? (If an idle mind is the devil's workshop, we can keep our little ones' minds busy while they're on our laps feeling our arms wrapped around them.)
- Read to your child often. *Several short sessions each day work best!* Attention span is built minute by minute, page by page, story by story, day by day.
- Babies 6-12 months will enjoy fifteen- to thirty-minute sessions. Toddlers will almost certainly take as much time as you can give them. Read as often as you can throughout the day.

The ideal time to begin sharing books with children is during babyhood, even with children as young as six weeks.

*(Starting Out Right, National Research Council)*

## Picking books

If your infant or toddler doesn't seem to enjoy being read to, the solution may be as simple as trying new books. Babies at a very young age will let you know which books they like and which ones they don't!

Babies under six months:

- Books with bright, simple images
  - o one word and one image to a page is ideal
  - o babies can't recognize complicated illustrations
  - o Helen Oxenbury, "I Hear," "Playing," "Family," etc.

- Tana Hoban, Lucy Cousins
- well-done concept books (colors, shapes, numbers)
- we love “Museum Shapes,” “Museum Numbers,” etc.
- Books with babies’ faces
  - single, large face per page
  - we love “My Nose, My Toes”
- Mother Goose!!
  - so many excellent ones to choose from—try more than one
  - we especially enjoy Rosemary Wells’ collections (in regular pages and board book) because the text is large and clear
- Books that can be sung
  - double benefit of singing and reading!
  - old folk songs with one line of song per page
  - Rosemary Wells’ “Read to Your Bunny” books; Raffi books

Babies six months to one year:

- All of the above
- Books that have one sentence of text per page
  - Text is still secondary to the image
  - Helen Oxenbury, “Say Goodnight,” “Clap Hands,” etc.
  - Anna Grossnickle Hines, “What can you do in the \_\_\_\_” series
- Classic interactive books
  - “Pat the Bunny”, “Where’s Spot?”, “Where Does Maisy Live?”, “Where’s Baby’s Belly Button?”
- Simple pop-up books
  - “Peek-A-Moo”, “Dinosaur Stomp!”, “Dinner Time” (Jan Pienkowski)
- Books with repetition
  - “Brown Bear, Brown Bear” (Eric Carle)

Older babies love word books. Older toddlers love picture dictionaries, and the Church’s scripture readers. We also enjoy fun collections of rhymes such as Denise Fleming’s “The Everything Book.” And we enjoy Margaret Miller’s and Joanna Cole’s non-fiction.

For other book ideas, pay attention to what the librarian reads during library sing-a-longs and story hours. Also, pay attention to which books are on display at children’s bookstores—often, the very best ones! Even if you purchase your books at other places (library used-book sales, for example), you will have a better sense of what you are looking for, if you have figured out what you like at the children’s bookstores. Also, consider checking out books from the library before buying them, to make sure that your child will like them!

Capitalize on your child’s interests and present circumstances (i.e., potty training, expecting a younger sibling, starting school soon, learning to make friends, moving to a new neighborhood, a change in season, an upcoming holiday).

## Affording the dream

President Hinckley: “When I was a boy we lived in a large old house. One room was called the library. It had a solid table and a good lamp, three or four comfortable chairs with good light, and books in cases that lined the walls. There were many volumes—the acquisitions of my father and mother over a period of many years. . . . In so many of our homes today there is not the possibility of such a library. Most families are cramped for space. But with planning there can be a corner, there can be an area that becomes something of a hideaway from the noises about us where one can sit and read and think.”

What planning is required so that I can have books for my children?

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### Resources:

1. The public library. A library card is free. You can check out an unlimited number of books. At the reference desk, you can request a PIN number, also free of charge. In the comfort of your own computer, you can browse the library catalog (<http://www.ci.cambridge.ma.us/~CPL/>) and then enter your library card number and PIN number to request the titles you want. They will be ready and waiting for you when you go to the library (this service is also free). And if you are unable to return your books on the day they are due, you can renew your books from home online (again, a free service). From the library website, you can also access hours, locations, and the schedule of wonderful library events.
2. Used book sales. The Cambridge Public Library has an annual used book sale during the first week of December. Many nursery and elementary schools have used book fairs in the fall and spring. There are tons of wonderful books there for nickels, dimes, and quarters. The spring season for these events is almost upon us. Peabody Elementary School (corner of Linnaean and Walker Street in Cambridge) is having their fair on May 10.
3. Used books on amazon.com and half.com.
4. Book orders through elementary schools.
5. Know the titles that you want, so that when family and friends ask what your children would like for gifts, you can answer.

### A few other thoughts:

- Display at least some of your books face-out. This will be more exciting to the children than the spines of the books. (It is less space-efficient, but better marketing. Think of how grocery stores market their products.) Rotate which books are displayed with the cover showing.
- Make the corner of your home devoted to books more comfortable and warm and inviting than the corner of your home devoted to television viewing, and your kids just might spend more time there. Mary Leonhardt offers 99 truly exciting ways to encourage your children to love reading in “99 Ways to Get Kids to Love Reading.”

- Make books as available to your children as any other toys. Put books in baskets throughout your apartment and home. Don't be so protective of books that your kids can never touch them, turn the pages themselves, or take them to bed with them.

## Quick Tips

- I. For babies who like to grab books, let them hold another book or teething toy while you read. Be prepared to constantly swap books back and forth during the reading time (that is, if they decide mid-book that they want to hold the book you're reading, then just move to the next book on your stack.)
- II. Be sure to cuddle and hold your child, so they know they are the most important to you—more important than any particular book or schedule. You are conditioning them to associate reading with pleasure.
- III. Let the child turn the pages, feel the textures, and ask questions.
- IV. Many people say that the most common mistake in reading aloud to children is reading too fast. Slow down. Let your child absorb more!
- V. Add an extra dimension to the reading whenever possible. Eat cookies after reading "If you give a mouse a cookie." Pick flowers after reading a book about spring. Point to your baby's body parts when reading a book about body parts. Gather objects of different colors to look at along with a book about colors.
- VI. Have relatives who live far away record books and stories on cassette.
- VII. Jim Trelease: Vary the length and subject matter of your readings.
- VIII. Read the same book again and again and again and again, if your child wants you to. Children gain self-esteem as we honor their requests. Also, children learn by repetition, and the most learning will take place as they hear the same stories again and again because they understand more each time.
- IX. Don't be afraid of big vocabulary or unknown words. Children are sponges! They learn by hearing new vocabulary. If you dumb-down the text by substituting easier words, you're not taking advantage of one of the best things about books—that they expose children to new words!
- X. Play games centering on the books you've read. Pretend to be Wilbur and Charlotte after reading "Charlotte's Web." Pretend to be the greedy troll after reading "The Three Billy Goats Gruff." (This works especially well to ease tense moments. If a child doesn't want her hair washed, just change into your greedy troll voice. It recalls the fun times earlier in the day when you were reading books together, and it changes everything into a game!)
- XI. Try reading different versions of the same story (for example, a cute variation of "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" is "Somebody and the Three Blairs").
- XII. Don't buy books just because they received awards. Read the books you like. And don't be afraid to take a permanent black marker to the page to mark out a word or sentence if you prefer the story without it.
- XIII. Jim Trelease: Don't use books as a threat ("no books tonight if you don't get in your pajamas right now"). If you turn the book into a weapon, your child's attitude toward it will change from positive to negative. Remember, we want our children to LOVE reading!

- XIV. Check out the U.S. Department of Education's free series of outstanding booklets for parents, "Helping Your Child," which you can order free of charge online at <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/hyc.html>, full of great suggestions and practical ideas for parents.
- XV. Check out the church website for fun activities with your children (go to [www.lds.org](http://www.lds.org) → home and family → family activities).

## **Thoughts on Television versus Reading for Babies and Toddlers**

President Hinckley: "I feel sorry for those who are addicted to the tube. I believe it is an addiction. It becomes a habit as pernicious as many other bad habits."

As of August 1999, the American Association of Pediatrics recommends no television or videos at all for children under the age of two, and a combined total of no more than one to two hours of daily media consumption (television, movies, video games, computer) for children over two.

Jim Trelease: Television tends to be an antisocial experience for children, whereas being read to is a social experience. Television interrupts family conversation, which is the child's most important language lesson. Furthermore, television deprives children of their most important learning tool: questions. With books, children can stop and ask questions and study pictures and then tell you when they're ready for you to turn the page. They haven't missed anything. But television is relentless. Children can't ask questions without missing what's happening next.

Paul Copperman: "Consider what a child misses during the 15,000 hours from birth to age 17 he spends in front of the TV screen. He is not working in the garage with his father, or in the garden with his mother. He is not doing homework, or reading, or collecting stamps. He is not cleaning his room, washing the supper dishes, or cutting the lawn. He is not listening to a discussion about community politics among his parents and their friends. He is not playing baseball or going fishing or painting pictures. Exactly what does television offer that is so valuable it can replace these activities that transform an impulsive, self-absorbed child into a critically thinking adult?"

President Hinckley: "If we could follow a slogan that says, "Turn off the TV and open a good book," we would do something of substance in strengthening another generation."

## Free Storytimes in Cambridge

### Mondays

- 10:30 AM: Toddler Time (0-3 year olds)  
O'Neill Branch Library (70 Rindge Avenue, 617-349-4023)
- 10:30 AM: Preschool Story Time (2-5 year olds)  
Boudreau Branch Library (245 Concord Avenue, 617-349-4017)
- 4:00 PM: Time of Wonder Storytime (2-3 year olds)  
Main Library (449 Broadway, 617-349-4038)

### Tuesdays

- 10:00 AM Toddler Sing  
Collins Branch Library (64 Aberdeen Avenue, 617-349-4021)
- 11:00 AM Time of Wonder Storytime (2-3 year olds)  
Main Library (449 Broadway, 617-349-4038)
- 11:00 AM Storytime with craft and snack (0-5 year olds)  
Downstairs children's area of the Harvard Coop
- 6:30 PM Stories read by grandparents, with snack (2nd Tuesday of month)  
O'Connell Branch Library (48 Sixth Street, 617-349-4019)

### Wednesdays

- 10:30 AM Toddler Sing  
Boudreau Branch Library (245 Concord Avenue, 617-349-4017)
- 10:30 AM Toddler Sing  
Central Square (45 Pearl Street, 617-349-4012)
- 10:30, 11:30 Toddler Sing  
Main Library (449 Broadway, 617-349-4038)
- 11:00 AM Toddler Sing  
O'Connell Branch Library (48 Sixth Street, 617-349-4019)
- 3:00 PM Wild Wednesdays and Live Creature Feature for Children  
Harvard Museum of Natural History (free on Wednesday afternoons)  
*\*\*not a storytime, but fun for children*

### **Thursdays**

- 10:30 AM Toddler Sing and Storytime  
Central Square (45 Pearl Street, 617-349-4012)
- 11:00 AM Story Time  
Henry Bear's Park Toy Store (361 Huron Avenue, 617-547-8424)

### **Fridays**

- 10:00 AM Toddler Sing  
Collins Branch Library (64 Aberdeen Avenue, 617-349-4021)
- 10:00 AM Toddler Singing and Dancing with the Music Man  
Downstairs at Finagle A Bagel, 14 JFK Street in Harvard Square
- 10:30 AM Story Time with coloring and snacks  
Barefoot Books (1771 Mass. Ave., 617-349-1610)  
*\*\*Check online at [www.barefoot-books.com](http://www.barefoot-books.com) for other free afternoon events (i.e. Princess dress-up storytime, cookie decorating storytime)*

### **Saturdays**

- 10:30 AM Story Time with coloring and snacks  
Barefoot Books (1771 Mass. Ave., 617-349-1610)
- 11:00 AM Storytime with craft and snack (0-5 year olds)  
Downstairs children's area of the Harvard Coop
- Morning Storytime and Music  
Stella Bella Toys (1360 Cambridge Street, 617-491-6290)