



# The Magic of Story Time

In this issue we explain how as childcare practitioners we can easily engage with and encourage children to explore stories in a range of different ways, to discover the magic of story time!

## Why tell stories?

One of the many daily activities we undertake is story time. It plays an integral part in caring for and educating young children because of its ability to enhance a range of development areas. Dynamic story telling not only develops a child's language skills but also cognitive functions, such as the concepts of cause and effect and moral and ethical behaviours.

**We all have memories of being read to as children either by a parent, grandparent or in nursery. Do you remember listening to a story so attentively that you could hear a pin drop? Or do you remember taking part in a story so actively that you had to battle with everyone in the group to get your voice heard?!**

"The seeds of dreams are often found in books and the seeds you help plant in your community can grow across the world."

Dolly Parton



A child's imagination can run wild with their curiosity stimulated. Storytelling presents a great way to explore emotions which can help in a child's understanding of change and frightening events. Books about going to the dentist or hospital, starting at school or making new friends will help a child make sense of the world around them.

## Before reading a book

As childcare practitioners we have the ability to ensure children are engaged with the world of books and develop into literate young people. We are in the privileged position of helping children enjoy books by reading with them and telling stories that build on a child's interests.

There is far more to engaging a child in books than picking one up and reading the text.

To ensure children are enthused the following steps can be taken:

- **Choose age-appropriate books**  
A four-year-old child will soon lose interest in a book if it is aimed at a different audience age – for example, a flap lifting book or a book with little illustration and too heavy in text.
- **Choose books in line with the interests of the children** Children are far more likely to become engaged in a story if the content interests them.
- **Don't limit books to story time** If a child shows an interest in a book and is excited to share it with you, take the time to read the story with them.
- **Be familiar with the book** This will help when needing to emphasise a word in

the correct place, learn the pace and tune of a rhyme or answer any questions the children may have.

- **Reading den!** Create an interesting, enticing and calm place to read stories and allow the children to access this area freely.
- **Rotate books regularly** Add new books as children's interests and the curriculum themes change.



## Reading in other languages

You can read to children in **whatever language you feel most comfortable speaking**, Welsh for example.

Don't worry if Welsh isn't the children's first language, just remind yourself that as babies and young children we all learned to speak by learning a few words at a time, practicing and repeating words through playing, singing, reading and other everyday routines. Story telling in a language that is different to the child's will help you to communicate more easily and can help to make reading and storytelling more fun

for you both. Children will learn that words are made up of different letters, syllables and sounds, and that words usually link to the pictures on the page.

Another option is to read a book aloud in English and talk about it with the children in Welsh. Don't worry that they aren't understanding if they respond initially in their native language. This is a normal process of learning a new language. Continuing to use Welsh will build the children's confidence and they will then begin to respond accordingly.



## Reading with babies and toddlers

Sharing a story book provides an excellent opportunity for a warm, positive and secure relationship to be built between practitioner and child. There are a host of ways to ensure that the one-to-one time spent reading books with the children meets their needs.

- Find a quiet place to read to young children.
- Allow babies to handle, explore and even taste the books as you're reading. This is how they learn. Make sure that books are cleaned regularly and are part of the cleaning rota.
- Let babies and toddlers try to turn the pages with your help.
- Talk about the content of the book. What colours can be seen? Encourage the repetition of words or sounds.
- Have books available to explore throughout the day and read little and often.
- Don't expect children to sit still for a whole book.
- Calm babies with nursery rhymes and songs.
- Read books before rest or nap time to help children relax and go to sleep.



## Reading with Pre-schoolers

Reading and stories play an important role in the child's curriculum. Try to incorporate some of the following tips to help pre-school children engage in and enjoy their books.

- Don't overload reading time. Children have different attention spans and you should increase daily reading time gradually in line with the child's attention span.
- Read to children on a one-to-one basis. Taking the time to read to a child on their own can make them feel special and also provides an opportunity for assessment.
- Before you begin reading the book, take the time to have a run through, looking at the illustrations and asking open-ended questions. Ask children what they think is happening. This helps them develop their imagination and problem solving skills.
- Make sure the illustrations are visible to all children.
- Use sound and voice to help enthuse the children. Make the word 'happy' sound happy or the word 'tired' sound tired.
- Encourage children to help say repeated words or phrases.
- Ask children what they liked about the story? What didn't they like? Can they think of another ending?
- Incorporate the story into other parts of the day to enhance storytelling and the learning opportunity.

## How can I enhance story telling?

When story telling using a book, the story itself should only be part of the consideration. Interesting illustrations, and word patterns such as rhymes, can get the children talking about what they see and think, and can provide an understanding of language patterns. Storytelling should not be limited to 'story time' but should play an important role in the activities that are planned throughout the day.

Childcare practitioners should aim to include as many physical actions as possible when storytelling. By animating story time the child's imagination and cognitive functions can be stimulated and developed as well as providing obvious physical advantages. Play Wales' Physical Literacy program is an excellent tool that provides the resources and skills to carry out fully inclusive physical storytelling.

## There is an abundance of learning opportunities that can be used to enhance a story outside the book corner.

Many other learning opportunities can be provided for children if you use some 'thinking outside the box', research and internet browsing.

Why not use these top tips for sharing stories:

- 1) A story bag/box is a great and simple way of enhancing a story.** Use a large bag to put a favourite story in and collect supporting materials. The supporting materials can be anything: photographs, pictures, maps and puppets, to name a few. Story bags help provide stimulating language activities, allow the child to access the resources independently, and can even be taken home to allow parents the opportunity to extend the child's learning at home.
- 2) Using illustrations to tell stories is fun and engaging.** The children's imaginations and creativity can run wild. Allowing children to create their own illustrations encourages them to change the narrative of a familiar story.
- 3) Story telling is not confined to indoors.** As well as allowing their imaginations to run freely, children can be physically more expressive in an outdoor play area. Other materials can also be used, such as water, mud and sand.
- 4) Using recyclable materials commonly found in the home or in the provision,** children can make their own 3D re-creation of a scene in their favourite story.

