

Supporting Children’s Reading at Home: DEVELOPING LANGUAGE

The strategies and supporting activities described below are taken primarily from [Supporting Your Child’s Reading at Home](#), a resource developed by [REL Southeast](#) and informed by the [What Works Clearinghouse \(WWC\) Practice Guide](#) titled [Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade](#). This resource is part of a series of instructional briefs designed to help families, afterschool providers, and other caregivers support their children’s early reading instruction while learning at home or in a hybrid learning environment.

Talking about books helps children build vocabulary and develop skills using language typically found in school settings, also referred to as academic language. Children typically develop social language skills naturally—language used to communicate with family and friends. Academic language skills, however, require instruction. Teaching children to think and connect ideas from many contexts allows them to follow more complex language, which they might find in stories, instructions, and descriptions of historical events or nature.

Alignment to 3 of the 10 Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K to 3¹

- Read-alouds of age-appropriate books and other materials, print or digital (Essential #2)
- Intentional and ambitious efforts to build vocabulary and content knowledge (Essential #7)
- Collaboration with families in promoting literacy (Essential #10)



1 Talk while you read.



Having a conversation about a book helps develop the child’s vocabulary and knowledge about the topic of that book. Whether you are reading a fairy tale, a picture book, an informational book, or any other text, you can engage in a discussion as you enjoy reading together. You can use books from your home or local library, or download ebooks to your computer, tablet, or smartphone.

- **Read** books with detailed pictures about topics that are interesting to the child, and **ask** the child to make connections to the world around them and their own life.
- **Choose** a variety of books, including both fictional stories and informational texts, that children can see themselves in. Use questions that require more than “yes” or “no” responses to **prompt** discussions that build language skills.

- **Use** discussion tools to engage children in conversation and to ask different types of questions about books. As children progress, ask increasingly complex questions.
 - **Prompt** the child to say something about the book.
 - **Evaluate** the child’s response.
 - **Expand** the child’s response by rephrasing and adding information to it.
 - **Repeat** the prompt.
- **Completion.** Ask the child to complete a sentence or phrase from a book you are reading.
- **Recall.** Ask about details of what you read.
- **Open-ended.** Ask about a picture in the book.
- **W.** Ask Who, What, Where, When, or Why questions.
- **Distancing.** Ask questions that relate something in the story to the child’s life.



2 Support oral language and vocabulary development.



Oral language is the way we communicate with others through speaking and listening. Vocabulary knowledge is a crucial part of oral language and includes understanding the meaning of words, how to use them, and how to pronounce them. Speaking and listening to children every day about books and experiences helps children expand their vocabulary and become better readers. You can talk about the books you read, people you know, places you go, and experiences you have together.

- **Ask** questions that require more than a yes or no answer. For example, instead of asking, “*Did you have a good day?*”, ask, “*What was your favorite part of school today?*” Continue to ask questions about the child’s response. If the answer was “*Recess,*” ask, “*Who did you play with?*” “*What did you do?*” “*How do you play that game?*”
- **Model** speaking in complete sentences and provide details. For example, if the child points to a butterfly and says, “*Butterfly!*”, **say**, “*Yes, that is a monarch butterfly! Aren’t her colorful wings beautiful?*”
- **Introduce** children to new words that will occur frequently and in a variety of contexts, and **provide** opportunities for children to use and discuss new words.

For additional videos and activities, check out [Supporting Your Child’s Reading at Home](#).




Videos





Printables



Talking While You Read

- A mom engages her child in conversation while reading [Llama Llama and the Bully Goat](#).
- A mom reads [The Legend of Spookley the Square Pumpkin](#) to her child and asks questions throughout.
- [Talking While You Read Stories](#) (241 KB ) – Use this bookmark to ask questions about the characters, setting, problem, and solution while reading a story with your child.
- [Summarize a Story](#) (333 KB ) and [Incredible Inferences](#) (837 KB ) – Use these activities to help older readers practice summarizing stories and making inferences.

Supporting Oral Language and Vocabulary Development

- Parents use open-ended questions to engage children in [Dinner Table Talk](#).
- A mom incorporates [Language Development in the Kitchen](#) while baking brownies with her children.
- [Talking and Writing in the Kitchen](#) (2.1 MB ) – Use these questions, activities, and conversation starters to have fun while you talk and write in the kitchen.
- [Synonyms and Antonyms](#) (195 KB ) – Use this activity to practice identifying and writing synonyms and antonyms.