

Especially for practitioners working with infants! 

Repeated Storytelling

 *Print Awareness and Reading*

Infants delight in hearing the same story over and over. Hearing the same story again and again helps infants become familiar with words, phrases, and sayings.

What is the practice?

Storytelling is simply a way of making talking and interacting a fun, interesting, and enjoyable experience for a child. Infants “say” to their caregivers, “tell me more,” by getting excited when they hear the same story again and again. Phrases such as “once upon a time” become cues that let the child know she is about to hear a story. The more the child hears the familiar sounds of a story she likes, the more she will vocalize and use gestures to get you to tell the story again.



What does the practice look like?

Storytelling with infants involves short stories or phrases that have highly repetitive elements. They can be made-up stories, like telling the child about coming home from the hospital, or you can use a book to read a story to the child. The best storytelling includes exaggerated facial and body movements and highly expressive sounds and words that bring the story to life! Ham it up. The child will love it.

How do you do the practice?

Here are some ideas for introducing stories to the child:

- Pick a story that is about something familiar and interesting to the child, like a favorite toy, pet, or family member.
- Keep the story simple, short, and repetitive. A child's first stories should be only about three or four sentences so the sounds become more and more familiar.
- Make the child the star of the story! Make up stories about the child, and when using a book to tell a story, pretend the story is about her.
- Use funny gestures, silly voices, and exaggerated facial expressions when telling the story. Make the story entertaining.
- Look for signs that the child wants you to tell her the story again. Any time she seems to want to hear the story again, ask: “Do you want me to tell you the story again?” Repeat the story as many times as she seems interested in hearing it.
- Encourage the child to become part of the storytelling. Ask simple questions and answer them for the child (e.g., “Did you like the story about [child’s name]? Yes, you did! You are a superstar!”).
- The child does not need to understand the story to be part of the storytelling. The idea is to use storytelling to make a conversational activity fun, and for the child to hear the same words and phrases over and over.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does the child get excited when you are about to tell a story?
- Is the child especially attentive to the words and your movements?
- Does she smile and vocalize as part of hearing the story?

Take a look at more repeated storytelling

I Love This Story!

Ananda is six months old. When Ananda's dad drops her off at child care every morning, her caregiver, Holly, sits with her in a cuddling position where Ananda is able to see Holly's face. This has become a favorite position for Ananda to listen to her special story. Holly starts by asking in an exaggerated tone, "How is my big girl doing today?" She continues in a lively tone of voice, "Ananda is so big and so, so strong. Ananda is also soooo, soooo, cute!" Holly laughs and asks, "You like your story, don't you?" Then she repeats the story in a sing-song manner with exaggerated facial expressions, "Ananda is so-big, so-strong, and soooo cute!" Ananda "hangs on" every word by listening, smiling, vocalizing, and moving about, showing how much she likes her story.



My Own Story

Lauren's home visitor, Talia, has explained the importance of storytelling to Lauren's parents, even though Lauren is too young to really understand the words yet. Lauren's father has made up a story about how much he and Lauren's mom wanted a little girl. "Once upon a time Mommy and Daddy decided to have a baby." (Lauren looks intently.) "They so hoped it would be a little girl. And guess what?" (Waiting for Lauren to respond) "We got our little Lauren! You are just what we wanted. We are soooo, soooo very lucky (in a lively tone)." Dad pauses between sentences in the storytelling, as Talia recommended, so that Lauren can

say or do something like vocalize or smile. Whenever she does, Dad adds, "You like your story, don't you?" Lauren has become more and more involved in the story the more she hears it.

"What Did He Hear?"

Jamie was diagnosed with a visual impairment when she was just about 4 months old. She has learned to listen intently to sounds as a way of knowing what is going on around her. Jamie's early interventionist helped her mother use Jamie's keen listening skills to make her part of a storytelling game they play together. Mom holds Jamie on her lap and starts the story by saying, "Once upon a time, Jamie went for a ride with her mommy." (Mom holds her daughter on her legs and moves her about.) "Jamie listens to everything around her. What did she hear? A dog?" (Mom says "woof.") "A cat?" (Mom says "meow.") "A cow?" (Mom asks "What does the cow say?"). The story continues while Jamie coos and wiggles in response to her mom's questions.

