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Wee Beginner (0 – 18 months): Reading and Storytelling with Babies and Children

Reading aloud and sharing stories with your child is a great way to spend time together. Reading and storytelling also helps promote language, literacy and brain development.

Why reading is important for babies and young children

Sharing stories, talking and singing every day helps your child's development. You're helping your child become familiar with sounds, words, language and the value of books. This all builds your child's early literacy skills, helping her go on to read successfully later in life. Reading stories **sparks your child's imagination**, stimulates curiosity and helps with brain development.

Reading or telling stories can also be a **safe way to explore strong emotions**, which can help your child understand change, as well as new or frightening events. Books about going to the dentist or hospital, starting at child care or making new friends will help your child learn about the world around him.

Reading stories with children has benefits for grown-ups too. This special time together **promotes bonding and helps to build your relationship**, laying the groundwork for your child's later social, communication and interpersonal skills.

Storytelling and songs

Reading isn't the only way to create a home environment that's rich in language and literacy experiences. Telling stories and singing songs also help your child develop early literacy skills and have a lot of fun at the same time.

Tips for sharing books with babies and young children

- Make a routine and try to share at least one book every day. Turn off the TV or radio, and find a quiet place to read so your child can hear your voice.
- Hold your child close or on your knee while you read, so she can see your face and the book.
- Try out funny noises and sounds – play and have fun!
- Involve your child by encouraging talk about the pictures, and by repeating familiar words and phrases.





Reading and Storytelling with Babies and Children continued...

- Visit your local library – it's free to join and borrow.
- Let your child choose the books when they are old enough to start asking.
- Be prepared to read favourite books over and over again!

Even reading for a few minutes at a time is effective – you don't always have to finish the book. As children grow, they're typically able to listen for longer.

What sort of books to read with your child

There are so many books to choose from that it can be hard to know where to start. As a broad rule, young children often enjoy books, songs and stories that have **good rhyme, rhythm and repetition**. In fact, one of the ways that children learn is through repetition and rhyme.

Consider books that are the right length for your child to reflect your child's changing interests and to keep them engaged.

Using your local library

Libraries have a lot to offer. Getting to know your local library can be a part of learning about and loving books.

You can borrow great children's books for free from your local library. This means you can have lots of books in your home for your child to explore – and it won't cost you a cent. Taking your child to the library and letting them choose their own books can be a fun adventure.

Libraries also offer story times and activities for young children. Going along to these sessions is a way to help your child become familiar with the library, have fun and enjoy books and stories.





Wee Explorer (18 months – 3 years): When Should I Begin Dental Care for My Child?

Good dental care begins *before* a baby's first tooth appears. Teeth actually begin to form in the second trimester of pregnancy. At birth, your baby has 20 primary teeth, some of which are fully developed in the jaw.

Here's when and how to care for your baby's teeth:

- Even before your baby starts teething, run a clean, damp washcloth over the gums to clear away harmful bacteria.
- Once your baby gets teeth, brush them with an infant toothbrush. Use water and a small amount of fluoride toothpaste.
- Once your baby's teeth are close together, you can begin flossing in between them.
- Children ages 3 and up should use only a small amount of fluoride toothpaste.

Even babies can develop tooth decay if good feeding habits aren't practiced. Putting a baby to sleep with a bottle might be convenient, but can harm the baby's teeth. When the sugars from juice or milk remain on a baby's teeth for hours, they can eat away at the enamel, creating a condition known as bottle mouth. Parents and childcare Providers should help young children set specific times for drinking each day because sucking on a bottle throughout the day can be equally damaging to young teeth.

Preventing Cavities

Cavities happen when bacteria and food left on the teeth after eating are not brushed away. Acid collects on a tooth, softening its enamel until a hole — or cavity — forms.

Here's how to keep cavities away:

- Start good oral habits early. Teach children to brush at least twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and to floss regularly.
- Get enough fluoride. Regular use of fluoride toughens the enamel, making it harder for acid to penetrate. Most toothpaste contains fluoride but toothpaste alone will not fully protect a child's teeth. Be careful, however, since too much fluoride can cause tooth discoloration. Check with your dentist before supplementing.





When Should I Begin Dental Care for My Child Continued...

- Limit or avoid certain foods. Sugary foods, juices, candy (especially sticky gummy candy, gummy vitamins, or fruit leather or "roll-ups") can erode enamel and cause cavities. If your children eat these foods, have them rinse their mouth or brush their teeth after eating to wash away the sugar. The same goes for taking sweetened liquid medicines: always have children rinse or brush afterward.

<http://kidshealth.org/en/parents/healthy.html?WT.ac=ctg#>





Wee Builder (3 – 4 years): Travelling with Young Children

Travelling with children can be fun. If travelling by car, plan to take breaks at child-friendly places, such as parks and playgrounds.

What to take

- Paper towels or wipes can be used in lots of ways.
- Take empty plastic bags for rubbish, dirty clothes and dirty nappies.
- Bring water to drink, and try to avoid too many soft drinks. Small plastic water bottles with pop-tops can be very good for young children
- Take some healthy food, such as fruit, to snack on.
- Take a change of clothes for each child. Depending on the season, you might also want to take hats or something warm to put on.
- Take a bag of things to do on the trip.

Car travel tips

- Never leave children alone in a parked car.
- Take everything off the dashboard and the back parcel ledge – even small things can fly off and injure your children if you have to stop suddenly.
- Travelling at night so your children can sleep isn't always a good idea, because it isn't safe to let them lie down on the seat without restraints.
- Be prepared for stops if a child feels sick or needs to go to the bathroom. They usually can't 'hang on' until the next town.

Keeping children amused in the car:

- Have some toys and books within easy reach.
- Play some children's music and sing along, or listen to a story CD.
- Point out interesting things you pass – for example, 'Look, can you see the train? Where do you think it's going?'
- If it's a long trip, stop every little while and let the child run around.
- Count the cars, horses, bridges or other things along the way. Guess how many you'll see before the next town.
- Sing some favourite songs. You can even try to make up some new verses for them.
- Play guessing games – for example, 'I'm thinking of an animal that's big and grey'.
- If it's a long car trip, plan to stop at playgrounds or parks along the way.
- Have some toys, books, sticker books and story CDs within easy reach.

http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/teeth_issues_school_age.html/context/363





We Learner (4-5 years): Family Routines

Routines are how families organize themselves to get things done, spend time together and have fun. Every family has its own unique routines. Routines help family members know what their expectations are. Family life might be more chaotic without routines.

Some benefits of routines for children are:

- It can be a way of teaching younger children healthy habits, like brushing their teeth, getting some exercise, or washing their hands after using the toilet.
- An organized and predictable home environment helps children and young people feel safe and secure.
- Routines built around fun or spending time together strengthen relationships between parents and children. Reading a story together before bed or going for a special snack after soccer practice can become a special time for you and your children to share.
- Daily routines help set our body clocks. For example, bedtime routines help children's bodies 'know' when it's time to sleep. If your child needs to take medicine regularly, a routine for this will help make both of you less likely to forget.

Why routines are good for parents

Routines take some effort to create. But once established, they have lots of benefits:

- They free up time for other things.
- When things are hectic, routines can help you feel more organized, which lowers stress.
- A routine will help you complete your daily tasks efficiently.
- As children get better at following a routine by themselves, you can give fewer instructions and nag less.

<http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/routines.html/context/459>





Wee Expert (5-6 years): Teeth Issues

Common concerns about school-age children's teeth include teeth-grinding, thumb-sucking and teeth injuries like knocking out teeth. If your child plays sport, it might be time to think about a mouth guard.

Thumb-sucking

Most children grow out of the habit of sucking thumbs and fingers from 2-4 years of age. This can reverse the effects of thumb-sucking up to 5-6 years, because children still have their baby teeth. If children are still sucking after this age, dental problems can come up.

Teeth Grinding

Teeth-grinding in school-age children is common and doesn't usually need treatment. Most of the time, teeth-grinding doesn't last and doesn't cause damage to the child's teeth. But if it continues, talk to a dentist. It could lead to your child experiencing headaches, tooth or jaw pain, or wearing down his teeth. There are devices to protect teeth from grinding at night, consult a dentist.

Mouth guards

Mouth guards can help **protect children's teeth** from knocks and falls. If the child plays sports, it's good to try to get the child used to wearing a mouth guard from an early age.

Mouth guards should:

- Be thick enough (4 mm) to provide protection against impact
- Fit snugly and be comfortable
- Be odourless and tasteless
- Allow normal breathing and swallowing
- Allow normal speech





Teeth Issues continued...

To help your child's mouth guard stays clean and in good shape, you can make sure your child:

- Rinses it before each use, and brushes it with a non-abrasive toothpaste afterwards
- Cleans it every now and then in soapy water, making sure to rinse it thoroughly
- Carries it in a container that has vents
- Doesn't leave it in the sun or in hot water

Take the mouth guard along to your child's dental visits to make sure it still fits correctly. Your child might need a new mouth guard when changes happen in their mouth, such as adult teeth coming through.

http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/teeth_issues_school_age.html/context/363





Wee Mentor (6+ years): Creative Learning and Development: Ideas and Activities

Creative play and imaginative arts experiences play a central role in school-age children's learning and development. You can encourage a child's creativity with free-flowing creative activities and by getting involved in the child's play.

Here are some ideas.

It's important for the child to enjoy the process of creating and also to think about the creative processes and experiences. Parents can help by encouraging the child to **share artworks and creative activities** with you and the family. When the child is creating something, it's also good for him to **keep experimenting** and changing his artworks until he feels satisfied. Parents can encourage this process by showing interest in what the child is making and giving him support when he needs it. Whatever the artwork, give lots of **descriptive praise**. For example, 'I like the rhyming words in your song'. This boosts the child's self-esteem and encourages the child to keep going with creative play. Try not to compare the child's creations with those of other children.

Here are some ideas to get the child started:

- Use different tools and techniques – for example, drawing, painting, clay-making, taking photographs or making videos. Take photographs and create a story using paper, an app or a software program.
- Use an empty cardboard box to make a house, a robot, a truck, an animal – whatever your child is keen on. Your child could cut up the box, glue things onto it or paint it.
- Use empty toilet rolls or small plastic juice bottles to make a family. Draw on faces, stick on paper clothes, and use cotton wool for hair. Your child could use these new toys to make up stories.
- Make use of found and natural material. For example, in autumn collect fallen leaves for drawing, pasting onto paper, or dipping into paint.
- Use small plastic lids, patty pan cases and other 'threadables' to make jewellery.
- Make papier mâché using old newspapers, glue and water.





Creative Learning and Development: Ideas and Activities continued...

Creative activities: drama

- Instead of throwing out old clothes, start a dress-up box or bag for dramatic play. Or thrift shops are also a great source of cheap and unusual clothes and props.
- Use dramatic play, songs and movement to act out things from daily life. It could be doctors, mothers, fathers, shopkeepers, firefighters, chefs – whatever interests your child. You could get involved by pretending to be a customer for your 'shopkeeper' child.
- Take turns telling a new, made-up story. You could begin with a simple situation from everyday life, and then take turns saying what happens next. The longer the game continues, the more imaginative and incredible the story can be.

