

The 7 Days • 7 Ways Principles

The Very Ready Reading Program promotes the **7 Days • 7 Ways** philosophy, which recommends seven activities that parents can share with their children every day. Early literacy research indicates that if parents share these seven activities on most days, their young children will have the building blocks (early literacy skills) needed for learning to read when entering school. For ages two to five, these seven activities are:

- 1. Share Books**
- 2. Share Words**
- 3. Share Rhymes**
- 4. Share Songs**
- 5. Share Stories**
- 6. Share Writing**
- 7. Share Playtime**

The following pages offer specific activities, based on the **7 Days • 7 Ways** principles, for parents and other caregivers to share with their children ages two through five. These pages may be reproduced as handouts for caregivers, or you may simply incorporate the ideas and activities into storytimes, presentations, and other communications and outreach.

7 Days • 7 Ways

To Parents and Caregivers:

Try to do each one of these seven core activities every day—a few minutes at a time, at different times of the day. If your child isn't receptive at times or you miss a day, don't worry! Just try later or continue the next day.

- 1. Share Books**
- 2. Share Words**
- 3. Share Rhymes**
- 4. Share Songs**
- 5. Share Stories**
- 6. Share Writing**
- 7. Share Playtime**



Share Books

- Read to your child from birth. Research suggests that reading to children and having books at home are two of the greatest indicators for later reading success.
- Share a variety of types of books, including non-fiction. Reading books is the best way to increase a young child's vocabulary because books are filled with rare and unusual words that are not often included in speech.
- Choose books appropriate for your child's listening and interest level. (Ask your librarian for suggestions.)
- Introduce a book you are reading to your child by discussing the cover. Focus your child on the illustrations and ask, "What do you think this story might be about?" Point to the title of the book and read it. Ask your child if his guess about what the story is about is still the same.
- Talk about the pictures, point to repeated words from time to time, and let your child help turn the pages.
- Ask simple questions when reading to your child so that she can participate in the storytelling, such as "What animal is this?" and "What color is the frog?" Or help your child develop predictive skills by asking, "What do you think will happen next?"
- Avoid asking questions on every page, as this interrupts the flow of the story. You might want to read the book once, and then open it to a random page and ask questions about something on that page.
- Read several books at different times during the day, particularly if your child has a short attention span. It does not matter if you finish the book.

- Allow your child to help pick out the books for you to read together.
- Ask the librarian for book suggestions on subjects that interest your child.
- Try to read simple fact books (nonfiction) to your child often, so that she can learn about her world. These informational books provide different and more complex vocabulary than story books do.
- Keep books in several places and always within your child's reach. Placing some near your child's toys might prompt him to look at books while playing.
- Avoid flash cards and commercial programs that claim they can teach your child to read. These programs most often are not developmentally appropriate. They may destroy your child's positive attitude toward reading.
- Make sure all of your reading experiences are fun for your child. If he is not enjoying himself, stop and try again at another time.
- Read with expression, using different voices and vocalizing sounds to keep your child's interest and to make the book come alive.
- Pick books you like, and share them enthusiastically. Your child will ask for more!

Share Words

- Try to introduce a few new words to your child every day. Simply say the new word and explain it briefly.
- Repeat new words often so your child learns how to pronounce them. This is why the repetition of rhymes and songs is so important.
- Introduce challenging words. Children love big words. Define the word and use it in context. Give examples when appropriate. Use the new words a few times, and in no time your child will add them to his vocabulary.
- Nurture your child's vocabulary. The size of a child's vocabulary is a strong predictor of read-

ing success. The more words children understand (which can be much greater than the number they actually speak), the greater their ability to comprehend text and to figure out words they may not be familiar with (Adams et al., 1998).

- Share language while you go about doing your everyday activities and during your child's daily routines.
- Ask simple questions while reading an illustrated book. For example, if there is a bird on the page, ask your child, "What color is the bird? What is the bird doing in the picture?"
- Provide experiences for your child that will introduce new words, such as going to a zoo, going to a farm, and taking walks outside. Point out all the animals and objects that you see. Have your child repeat the new words she learns.
- Expand your child's vocabulary by exploring subjects that interest her. Add additional new words about the topic.
- Point to the words on signs and read the words aloud to your child when you are at a store, the post office, a park, or any other public place.
- Speak to your child in your native language. This way you'll be able to provide her with a rich vocabulary. She will learn to translate these words into other languages later.

Share Rhymes

- Recite or sing familiar nursery rhymes with your child often. Doing so establishes a pleasurable bond between the two of you. You can also read rhymes from nursery rhyme collections or books. Literacy experts suggest that children who know eight nursery rhymes by heart at age four will be among the best readers by the time they are eight (Fox, 2008).
- Share Mother Goose rhymes to help your child understand story elements, such as the beginning, middle, and end, as well as what happens first, next, and last. Many Mother Goose rhymes tell short stories that demonstrate these story elements.

- Repeat rhymes often as repetition introduces children to the predictability often found in stories. Rhymes do not need to make sense. Children enjoy the sounds of the rhyming words and repetitious phrases. These rhymes help children understand basic structures and patterns of speech.
- Repeat favorite rhymes often so that your child learns them and will eventually join in. This helps your child with narrative skills, an important early literacy skill.
- Make up silly rhymes, and act them out or dance with your child while reciting them.
- Play rhyming games with your child. “I spy something in this room that rhymes with the word _____.”
- Share finger rhymes throughout the day. Ask your librarian to recommend age-appropriate books of finger rhymes.
- Repeat rhymes often. Occasionally pause to let your child supply the rhyming word.
- Clap while singing or saying a nursery rhyme, one clap for each syllable.
- Make up simple motions that you and your child can do when reciting rhymes so that she can participate.
- Point out rhyming word pairs as you read rhymes to your child, and see if he is able to pair rhyming words.

Share Songs

- Sing to your child! The quality of your voice is unimportant. Your child will not care.
- Sing songs throughout the day; they can be songs you know or that you make up. For example, the tune “Here We Go ‘Round the Mulberry Bush” is easily adapted: “This is the way we brush your hair ...” Other good tunes for adapting are “Mary Had a Little Lamb,” “The Farmer in the Dell,” and “London Bridge Is Falling Down.”
- Sing songs at a normal speed; then sing them a little slower so your child can clearly hear the

words and the syllables that make up the words in the songs. This will improve her ability to discriminate sounds, which is a skill necessary for learning to read (phonological awareness).

- Emphasize syllables in words as you sing so your child can hear the smaller sounds in words. Songs have a different note for each syllable, which helps children break down words. You can clap the syllables to help your child hear them within words. This will help him break unfamiliar words apart when learning to read.
- Invite your child to play a simple instrument, such as a rattle or wrist bells (jingle bells attached to ribbon or an elastic band), as you sing.
- Find some songs your child likes, and designate one as the “waking up” song and another as the “going to bed” song. Children thrive on routines.
- Ask your librarian for picture books that are based on songs you can sing.
- Sing old favorites: “If You’re Happy and You Know It,” “Old MacDonald,” “Itsy, Bitsy Spider,” and “The Wheels on the Bus.”
- Sing the same songs over and over again (just like repeating readings of familiar books), as it helps your child learn words and build memory skills.

Share Stories

- Make up stories about what you are doing during the day or about something that happened to your child. Make up stories about things you see while riding in a car or walking to a location. You do not have to read a book to tell a good story!
- Tell a story sometime during the day. Telling stories (versus reading them) offers novelty and variety and helps develop language in its own way. When stories are told, they sound different from stories that are read. Oral storytelling encourages narrators to be more animated (to compensate for the lack of illustration), and it allows children to form their own mental images of characters and places instead of depending on illustrations provided in books.

- Use your child's favorite baby doll or stuffed animal to act out stories that you have made up or read in books.
- Ask questions once your child is verbal. Ask "what" and "how" questions so that your child has an opportunity to tell a story.
- Use family photos as a springboard to stories. Sharing stories about family helps children learn about their heritage and roots.
- Make homemade books for your child. Glue different fabrics to sheets of cardboard, and clip the "pages" together with binder rings to make a touch-and-feel book. Place magazine pictures (or photographs) in resealable bags and staple the bags together at the bottom to make a "baggie book." Cover the staples with plastic tape to make a safe binding. Use these homemade books to make up your own stories.
- Make up stories about things you see while taking a walk with your child. For example, tell a story about a bird or squirrel family you see in the yard or the park.
- Share simple wordless books with your child, telling the story you see in the illustrations. Then have your child retell the story. Ask your librarian for suggestions of suitable wordless books for very young children.
- Make up a story about the events of the day at the end of the day. Call the story "[Your child's name] Story." Children love to hear stories about themselves.
- Ask your child to draw a picture for you about a story you read, and recognize that it might just be a few scribbles for a young child.
- Provide crayons and colored pencils and different kinds of paper. Then play music of different tempos, and encourage your child to color to the music.
- Provide opportunities for your child to draw. Drawing helps children develop the muscles they will need to become writers. Drawing involves grasping a crayon or marker, holding the paper, and applying the right amount of pressure with the writing instrument, all at the same time.
- Help prepare your child's hands for writing and gaining fine motor skills by having her make objects out of play dough. Encourage your child to roll and pinch and squeeze the dough.
- Provide stencils and cookie cutters for your child to trace around. This is an excellent prewriting skill. Tracing templates (patterns) helps children learn how to properly hold a writing tool and strengthens the finger muscles that will be used for writing.
- Provide objects of different shapes for your child to trace and to begin to learn the name of shapes.
- Do "License Plate Rubbings" with your child. Use old license plates and provide paper and crayons so that your child can make a rubbing. Discuss the letters and numbers with your child.
- Cut letters or numerals out of sandpaper or use magnetic letters or numerals, and let your child "feel" the shape and directionality of the symbols. Then, using your finger, trace different letters or numerals in the palm of her hand, and ask her to guess the letter or numeral. She can also trace letters and numerals in your hand.
- Trace letters in a tray of sand or salt, and identify the letters. Help your child make the first letter for his name.
- Have your child dance with props, such as ribbons, and suggest that she make circles and move

Share Writing

- Keep a supply of different kinds of paper, chubby crayons, and washable markers where your child can reach them.
- Strengthen your child's small muscles that will be used for writing. Provide chubby crayons for two-year-olds who will enjoy scribbling and for three-year-olds who will begin to draw circles. Four- and five-year-olds enjoy regularly using crayons as they are beginning to actually draw people and houses.

her arms diagonally as she dances. These moves strengthen the small muscles in the wrist and hands that she will use for writing.

- Squirt foam shaving cream on a table so your child can practice writing the letters of his name in it with his fingers.
- Have your child dictate a story to you while you write it down. Your child will observe you writing and begin to recognize that spoken words can be written.
- Make a simple homemade book, and have your child dictate a story and draw pictures.
- Provide sidewalk chalk for your child to draw pictures and practice letters.
- Have your child practice fine motor skills and prewriting skills by cutting pictures out of old magazines. Other activities that support these same skills are stacking blocks, picking up toys, and finger painting.
- Label some objects in your child's room so that she can see the written words.

Share Playtime

- Sit down and play with your child several times a day. This is never a waste of time. It creates a special bond between you and your child and helps your child acquire confidence; plus, it fosters creativity and imagination in your child.
- Avoid television and computer screens with children under two, and limit television viewing for older children. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) discourages television viewing in the first two years of life and recommends a daily limit of one to two hours of high-quality content programming for older children. AAP also recommends that parents establish “screen-free” zones at home by making sure there are no televisions, computers, or video games in children's bedrooms and by turning off the TV during dinner. Also, AAP suggests that parents need to recognize that their own media use can have a negative effect on children (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2001).

- Provide play experiences, such as playing in water, playing in sand, using play dough, and finger painting, that allow your child to use her five senses.
- Use pots, pans, spoons, and other household items for playthings. Playtime does not necessarily mean playing with toys.
- Provide opportunities for small motor activities, such as playing with blocks, alphabet letters, or puzzles with four to 12 pieces for ages two to three and 12 to 50 pieces for ages four to five.
- Blow bubbles in as many ways as possible—through jar rings, straws, or the tops of salt shakers, for example.
- If you place books near your child's toys, she might opt for a story along with playtime. Find some books that are fun to play with, such as flap books or other books with movable parts.
- Encourage pretend play. It enriches vocabulary, enhances creativity, and helps children learn concepts. Provide props such as dress-up clothing, tea sets, stuffed animals, crowns, and so on. Act out a story, host a tea party, have a fashion show, crown a princess, or visit the zoo. The possibilities are endless!
- Pay attention to toy safety. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission has a published guide for suitable toys online. (Your librarian can help you find this.)

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