

Conversation Starters for Reading with Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers

The tips below offer fun ways to turn read-aloud time into interactive conversation time. Try a new tip each time you read!

1. Talk about the child's interests.

If a child points at or says something about an object, character, or event in the book, stop reading and discuss it! You don't have to read a book cover to cover for it to be a meaningful experience.

"I see you pointing at the umbrella. What do you use an umbrella for?"

"Tell me more about..."

2. Talk about the child's experiences.

Ask questions to help children connect an experience with something happening in the book.

"Remember when we walked by a dog? Was that dog as big as Clifford?"

"Look at this! It's the same as when you..."

3. Talk about the words.

Explain any vocabulary, ideas, or sayings that might be new to a child.

"The caterpillar is inside the chrysalis. Do you know what a chrysalis is?"

"It's raining cats and dogs! What does that mean?"

4. Talk about the illustrations.

Describe what you see on the page: count objects, identify colors, name anything you notice.

"Look at this picture! What do you think is happening?"

"The girl in this picture is smiling! How do you think she feels?"

5. Talk about the actual book.

Encourage children to touch the illustrations, trace words with their finger, and carefully turn pages.

"What do you think it's going to be about?"

"This is a long word! Let's name each letter as we touch it. Look at the cover of this book!"

If children are not yet using words you can understand, ask questions anyway! Listen for any sounds they make and watch for responses such as hand gestures, eye contact, or body language that lets you know a child is actively communicating with you.