



Words and Stories

Introduction

Parents, families, and caregivers are essential to a child's learning. From the moment a child is born, her caregivers help her to develop the skills that will someday make her a reader, writer, and communicator.

It may seem like an intimidating task, but parents, families, and other caregivers are already doing so much to help build these skills.

- When they make up and sing silly rhymes, they help their children to hear the sounds of words and language.
- When they talk out loud about the things they are doing and ask questions around the dinner table, parents and caregivers build their child's ability to express thoughts and ideas and comprehend those of others.
- When they share books at bedtime or read the label on a cereal box together, they show their child the joy and importance of reading.

Because language and communication are a part of everything we do, these early experiences help a child to thrive in all areas of life.

Everyday routines offer the perfect opportunity to help children learn new words, express thoughts and ideas, understand others, learn the sounds and shapes of letters, and comprehend stories. Regardless of their own literacy level or native language, parents and caregivers can support their child's learning.

This workshop offers strategies and activities to help parents, families, and caregivers find the learning opportunities that exist both at home and on-the-go. Through discussions, hands-on activities, take-home resources, and the "Words and Stories" video, you'll find everything you need to:

- Communicate the importance of recognizing the opportunities for learning that happen in everyday experiences.
- Share the benefits of engaging in conversations with children, asking questions, and encouraging children to talk throughout the day.

Words and Stories (CONTINUED)

- Explain how talking with a child helps him to become a better reader, writer, and communicator in all areas of life.
- Offer strategies to turn common objects and everyday experiences into opportunities to share new words and explore letters and sounds.
- Show parents and caregivers how they can build upon a child's interests to create rich learning experiences.
- Emphasize that parents and caregivers can be literacy leaders regardless of their own literacy level.
- Help parents and caregivers understand the importance of speaking, listening, reading, and exploring with their child in their native language.
- Suggest everyday activities that will build vocabulary, letter awareness, and a love of reading and books.
- Lead parents and caregivers in reflecting on how they can apply what they have learned with their own children.
- Try out and practice new ideas with parents and caregivers.

The Words and Stories workshop has been divided into the following sections:

- **Young Children and Literacy**—This section shares information about literacy development and empowers parents and caregivers to talk, read, write, and explore with their children.
- **Words, Words, Words**—This section explores the importance of talking with children during daily routines at home and on the go.
- **Books, Stories, and More**—This section shares ways to make reading a part of a child's day, every day.

As you lead this workshop you'll be using the "Words and Stories" video, which is 6 minutes and 11 seconds in length. In this video you'll meet:

- Aaliyah (age 3) as she builds language skills during a walk with her mom.
- Twins Teddy and Johnny (age 5) who have not yet developed verbal skills, as they hear stories and build communication skills using pictures and technology.

- Kendra (age 3) as she explores letters with her sisters Keyera (age 11) and Kayla (age 8) and reads with her parents.

Preparing for the Workshop

- Read the *Parenting Videos Workshop Overview*, found online in this workshop's Resources section, which contains helpful tips and information about the workshop series.
- Make copies of the following *Tips for Parents*, available in English and Spanish and found online in this workshop's Tips section. Have them available for parents and caregivers to pick up before the workshop begins or distribute them at the end.
 - *Books, Books, Books*
 - *Conversations Count*
 - *Draw It! Write It!*
 - *Get Ready to Read*
 - *Let's Go To the Library*
 - *Stories and Traditions*
 - *Good Books for Children* (You may also want to display some of the books from this list.)
- Watch the "Words and Stories" video. Take notes as you watch (and as you read through this guide). Keep a notebook of additional ideas and questions. You know your group best and can adapt the workshop to fit the needs and interests of the participants.
- Decide on an opening icebreaker activity. You may want to tailor the activity to the theme of the workshop. For instance, you can go around the room and ask participants to share their favorite childhood book or story.
- Gather supplies, including pencils, pens, and paper, as well as refreshments. For the "Bookmark Reminders" activity, you will need blank bookmarks (one per participant) and markers or crayons.

- If you are providing a series of workshops, have a flyer ready with future topics, dates, and times.

Section One: Young Children and Literacy

Leading Your Group

Begin by sharing all the wonderful learning that can happen throughout a family's everyday routines. You can mention:

- You can lead the way to literacy.
- Literacy doesn't just mean reading. Literacy skills are all the skills necessary to read and write. They include such things as awareness of the sounds of language, understanding the relationship between letters and sounds, and the ability to express and comprehend thoughts and ideas.
- Early literacy experiences, such as enjoying books together, having conversations, and playing with words, prepare your child to someday become a reader, writer, and communicator.
- Your everyday experiences are perfect opportunities to help your child build important literacy skills.
- In this workshop, we'll talk about building literacy skills through language-rich conversations, having fun with books, and playing with letters and sounds.

Chat and Share

Ask participants to name their everyday routines and write them in a visible place such as on a chalkboard, white board, or a large sheet of paper. You will use this list throughout your workshop to help frame your discussions around turning everyday moments into literacy-rich adventures. You can ask:

- What are your morning routines?
- Are there daily or weekly errands that you run? What are they?
- What are your afternoon, nighttime, and bedtime routines?

NOTE: Write down any additional questions that you would like to include. Is there an anecdote from your own life that you can share? Add that, too.

Watching and Learning

Watch the entire “Words and Stories” video together. (You will have an opportunity to return to various segments of the video throughout the workshop.) Before you watch, tell participants:

- In this video you’ll be seeing preschool-age children building literacy skills throughout their daily routines.
- Notice how their parents and caretakers support them in talking, reading, and exploring letters throughout their everyday experiences.

Reviewing and Reflecting

Lead a conversation about what participants noticed in the video. You might ask:

- What examples of talking, reading, and exploring letters and words did you see happening throughout the video?
- How were these activities embedded in everyday routines?
- What did you notice parents and caregivers doing to support these literacy activities?
- When Aaliyah took a walk with her mom outside, she was building important communication skills. By asking Aaliyah to notice and describe things, her mother was helping Aaliyah to express herself through language and to expand her vocabulary. These activities build Aaliyah’s ability to someday understand the things she reads and to express herself through writing. On that same walk, Aaliyah and her mom might also have tried hunting for letters on signs or license plates to help build awareness of print or reading the signs to build awareness of letter sounds and language. The opportunities are endless. When you take a walk with your child, what might you do to build her literacy skills?

Trying It Out

Everyday Literacy. Encourage participants to think of the literacy learning that can happen throughout their daily routines.

- Say to participants, *Teaching new words, reading, and exploring letters can happen as you go about your daily routines. Take a look at our list of routines. Is there one thing that we all do everyday?*
- Together, select a common routine and generate ways to make it a literacy-rich experience. Ask participants to come up with at least two activities under each of the following categories:

- Talking together
- Reading together
- Exploring letters and letter sounds
- Provide an example; say to participants, *While brushing teeth, you might talk about the importance of taking care of your teeth, ask your child to describe what toothpaste tastes like, or have him name some of the things he uses his teeth for throughout the day. You might read aloud the directions on the box, point out letters on the toothbrush, etc.*
- Encourage participants to jot down the ideas they generate and try them at home.

Section Two: Words, Words, Words

Leading Your Group, Part 1

Share the importance of helping children develop a love of language and strategies for which to do so. As you talk, draw supporting examples that have already been discussed. Focus on how participants can encourage and support learning during everyday interactions. You can mention:

- We've discussed some great ways to build language and communication, for example, finding opportunities within daily routines like brushing teeth.
- Language skills are essential to being able to read and write. The best way to build language skills is to talk.
- Children should hear and use language all day long. Talk as much as possible during all your daily routines and activities.
- Talk with your child in whatever language you feel most comfortable using.
- Narrate your actions as you go about your day. For example, if you are looking for a lost set of keys you might say, "Now where did I put my keys? I'm looking under the couch. I'm looking in my shoe. I'm looking behind the pillow." Give your child the chance to describe what you are doing, too.
- Children will be most excited to talk about things they are interested in, so follow your child's lead and encourage her to tell you about her favorite things.
- The more words your child hears and uses early in life, the better reader, writer, and communicator she'll someday become. That's because in books, in conversations, and

in writing, we communicate through words. To comprehend these words, your child will need to have lots of exposure to language and lots of practice using it.

Chat and Share

Ask participants to think about their children's interests. This will begin to help them consider people, places, and things that will inspire conversation. You can ask:

- What is your child most interested in? Does he get excited to go outside? Does he love animals or vehicles?
- What does he tell you about these things that are special to him?
- Have the things that are special to him changed over the last few months? How did he get interested in new things?

NOTE: In your notebook, write additional questions that you would like to include. Is there an anecdote from your own life that you can share? Add that, too.

Watching and Learning

Watch a portion of "Words and Stories" together. Begin at 1:18 as Aaliyah and her mom go for a walk and end at 3:24 after Teddy's parents praise him for trying to say the word *exit*.

Reviewing and Reflecting

Lead a conversation about what participants noticed in the video. You might say:

- Teddy's parent's noticed that he was excited about the many exit signs that he saw out and about. They built upon this excitement by teaching him how to say and type the word *exit*. To help him understand the meaning of the word, they posted exit signs in all the doorways so Teddy would associate the word *exit* with the act of exiting a room.
- What are ways you explore new words with your child?
- What could you do to encourage your child to talk even more about the things he sees and does, both inside and outside your home?

Trying It Out

Word Web. Use everyday routines to teach lots of new words.

- Explain, *Just like Teddy, children often learn new words when they are excited and engaged. If your child loves trains, for instance, you might introduce him to lots of words related to trains.*
- On a chalkboard, whiteboard, or large sheet of paper, write the word *train*.
- Ask participants to call out any word they can think of that relates to the word *train*, such as train parts and words to describe the way a train moves, looks, and sounds (for example, *engine, freight, caboose, chug, huff, sleek, quickly, loud, whistle, etc.*)
- Write each word down and draw a line connecting it to the word *train*.
- Say, *We've identified many words that you can introduce to your child as he plays with his favorite train or watches a train go by outside. Introducing these words can be as simple as describing a train as it rolls by and then asking your child, "What do you notice about the train?"*
- Break participants into groups of three or four. Have each group generate a word web based on a common interest among their children. Ask them to think of how they might introduce these words as they go about daily routines.
- If time permits, have group members practice the narration technique with each other using these words.

Leading your Group, Part 2

Now introduce and define open-ended questions. Give examples and discuss some of the ways that participants can use open-ended questions to encourage their children's language and listening skills. You can mention:

- You can encourage your child to talk by asking lots of open-ended questions such as "What did you like about this book?" or "What's one thing that happened during music class today?"
- Open-ended questions encourage your child to explain her thoughts and ideas. Open-ended questions cannot usually be answered with "yes" or "no" and do not usually have a right or wrong answer. They sometimes begin with "How," "Why do you think," or "What if." For example, you might ask your child, "What if we all took a trip to the moon? What do you think we would see there?"

Words and Stories (CONTINUED)

- Ask your child questions about the things you see and do together, and about her thoughts and feelings. If you find that an open-ended question such as “How was your day?” is hard for your child to answer, try making the question more specific. For example, you might ask, “What’s one thing that happened on the playground today?”

Chat and Share

Ask participants to share the questions they ask about their child’s day. This will help families to think of interesting and engaging questions that encourage their children to talk and more. You can ask:

- What questions do you ask your child about her day? What questions does she seem most excited to answer?
- Does your child respond to funny questions such as “What was the silliest thing that happened today?”
- What are some funny questions you might ask?

NOTE: In your notebook, write additional questions that you would like to include. Is there an anecdote from your own life that you can share? Add that, too.

Watching and Learning

Watch a portion of “Words and Stories” together. Begin at 4:42 as Aaliyah sets up her paints and end at 5:09 after Aaliyah’s mother says “That’s a beautiful fire.”

Reviewing and Reflecting

Lead a conversation about what participants noticed in the video. You might ask:

- In the video, Aaliyah and her mom talk in Portuguese as Aaliyah paints. This is a great example of how talking in your home language helps build a strong foundation for English language learning.
- Aaliyah’s mom asks questions to encourage her daughter to use language. She asks Aaliyah to tell her what supplies they need for their art activity and to describe her drawing.
- What question might you ask Aaliyah about her drawing?

Trying It Out

Ask Away. Guide participants in formulating open-ended questions. Before you begin, write the following three questions on the board: “Did you have a good day?” “Is that a block tower?” “Do you want to play after dinner?”

- Say, *As we just discussed, one great way to get your child talking is by asking open-ended questions or questions that cannot be answered with a single word.*
- Point to the questions on the board and explain, *These are not open-ended questions because they can all be answered with one or two words.*
- Break participants into small groups. Explain that you’d like each group to change the closed-ended questions on the board into new, open-ended questions. Have them write down their new questions.
- Then, have participants look at the routines that are on the board and generate some open-ended questions they might ask during these routines.
- When the small groups have finished, gather as a large group to share the open-ended questions that participants came up with.

Section Three: Books, Stories, and More

Leading Your Group

Begin by discussing the many ways that books and stories can build literacy skills. As you discuss, draw supporting examples that have been offered by participants in previous discussions. You can mention:

- The books and stories that you share with your child build his comprehension skills, teach him new words, and help him to learn the sounds of letters.
- Reading together should be fun. When you have a good time with books and stories, your child will see that reading is full of joy and excitement. For example, Ellis and his niece act out some of the books they read.
- Read with lots of expression. Ask your child questions as you read.
- Encourage your child to join in and say words or phrases with you.

Words and Stories (CONTINUED)

- As you read, point out letters and their sounds. Your child may be particularly excited to find the letter that begins his first name. For example, Mona and her son hunt for the letters in his name at the post office.
- A bedtime story is a great way to make reading a part of a daily routine. But don't stop at bedtime and don't stop at books. Read everywhere and everything! For example, you can read a magazine on the bus, a board book in the checkout lane of the grocery store, and a sign at the post office. Offer a special reading surprise; for example, tell your child, "When we get home, we'll get out a flashlight and read a book together under the table!"
- Make up stories as you are out and about. It's a great way to make errands fun and build literacy skills, too. For example, if you are in the produce isle of the grocery store, you and your child can make up a silly story about how an apple and a watermelon had an adventure together. It will get you laughing, build your child's comprehension skills, and it will communicate to your child just how great stories can be.
- Ask lots of questions to get your child thinking and talking, such as "What do you think is going to happen in this book?" "Why did that happen?" "What do you think is going to happen next?"
- Encourage your child to "write" her own stories too. Her scribbles are the beginning of her learning to write and even if you can't read what she wrote, she'll be able to "read" her writing back to you.

Chat and Share

Ask participants to share their children's favorite books. You can say:

- One of the best ways to learn about great books for children is to ask other parents and caregivers which books their children love.
- Can you share one or two books that your children love?
- What stories do they want to hear again and again?
- What do you think they like about these stories?

NOTE: In your notebook, write additional questions that you would like to include. Is there an anecdote from your own life that you can share? Add that, too.

Watching and Learning

Watch a portion of “Words and Stories” together. Begin at 3:27 as Kendra reads with her parents and end at 4:42 after she says “Giddy up!”

Reviewing and Reflecting

Lead a conversation about what parents and caregivers noticed in the video. You might ask:

- In the video Kendra’s parents do many things to make the experience of reading a book rich, engaging, and special. They ask her questions, make animal sounds, and cuddle up close. What do you think Kendra is learning as they read together?
- As Kendra reads she hears the sounds of letters. Later, she continues building this skill with her sister around the dinner table as she writes letters. Are there other ways she might explore letters throughout the day? What other things might she read in addition to books? Where else might she look for letters?

Trying It Out

Bookmark Reminders. Come up with ways to make reading rich and dynamic.

- Explain, *Reading time can be a rich learning experience for your child. There are many ways to engage your child and have fun as you read together.*
- Give each parent a blank bookmark.
- Break participants into groups and ask them to think of ways to make reading a really exciting experience. Remind participants of a few of the ideas that have already been mentioned.
- Encourage participants to write their new ideas on their bookmark. Give them the opportunity to add some illustrations or decorations.
- Encourage participants to use the bookmarks with their children as reminders to make books come to life through fun activities and asking lots of questions.

Wrapping Up

End your session with an activity to help participants bring new knowledge home.

Idea Swap. Encourage participants to share ideas for building literacy skills throughout the day.

Words and Stories (CONTINUED)

- Break participants into pairs.
- Instruct each pair to look at the routines written on the board and to share one new literacy activity they are going to try during a daily routine. As an example, you might say, *During breakfast my daughter and I will look for letters on the cereal box.*
- If time allows, encourage participants to exchange even more ideas.

As you say goodbye to your group, remind participants that daily routines and events are full of opportunities for learning. You can mention:

- Children are born ready to learn and the world is their classroom.
- Children learn words through hands-on experiences.
- Follow your child's lead and ask questions about the things he's interested in.
- Talk with your child throughout the day.
- Play with letters and sounds.
- Make reading fun and read everywhere, everyday.
- Don't stop with books! Read cereal boxes, song lyrics, labels, signs, and more.
- Speak and read in whatever language you are most comfortable using.
- Enjoy your own books and magazines and share your love of reading with your child.

If possible, leave time so families can mingle and chat with one another, talk with you individually, and browse the books and other materials you've brought.

Massachusetts Guidelines for Preschool Learning Experiences

The Words and Stories workshop has been designed to meet the Massachusetts Early Learning Guidelines for Preschool Learning Experiences. The purpose of these guidelines, developed by the Massachusetts Association for the Education of Young Children for the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) in 2003, is to provide a comprehensive view of the development of preschool aged children while documenting the experiences that support this development and school readiness. The guidelines are for families as well as early education and care professionals.

For more information about the guidelines, including definitions of terms, visit <http://www.mass.gov/edu/birth-grade-12/early-education-and-care/curriculum-and-learning/>.

This workshop aligns with the following guidelines:

Learning in English Language Arts

Children will be able to:

- Participate actively in discussions, listen to the ideas of others, and ask and answer relevant questions.
- Communicate personal experiences or interests.
- Listen to and use formal and informal language.
- Link letters with sounds in play activities.
- Listen to, recognize, and use a broad vocabulary of sensory words.
- Use their own words or illustrations to describe their experiences, tell imaginative stories, or communicate information about a topic of interest.
- Listen to a wide variety of age appropriate literature read aloud.
- Develop familiarity with the forms of alphabet letters, awareness of print, and letter forms.
- Listen to, identify, and manipulate language sounds to develop auditory discrimination and phonemic awareness.

Words and Stories (CONTINUED)

- Link letters with sounds in play activities.
- Use their own words or illustrations to describe their experiences, tell imaginative stories, or communicate information about a topic of interest.
- Use emergent writing skills to make letters in many settings and for many purposes.

Learning in Mathematics

Children will be able to:

- Explore and describe a wide variety of concrete objects by their attributes.
- Listen to and say the names of numbers in meaningful contexts.
- Use positional language and ordinal numbers (first, second, third) in everyday activities.
- Listen to and use comparative words to describe the relationships of objects to one another.

Learning in Science and Technology/Engineering

Children will be able to:

- Ask and seek out answers to questions about objects and events with the assistance of interested adults.
- Compare and contrast natural materials such as water, rocks, soil, and living organisms using descriptive language.
- Use their senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste to explore their environment using sensory vocabulary.

Learning in History and Social Science

Children will be able to:

- Identify and describe cause and effect as they relate to personal experiences and age-appropriate stories.

Learning in Health Education

Children will be able to:

Words and Stories (CONTINUED)

- Listen to and use appropriate language describing the names and functions of parts of the human body.
- Recognize and describe or represent emotions such as happiness, surprise, anger, fear, sadness.

Learning in the Arts

Children will be able to:

- Explore activities and vocabulary related to movement, balance, strength, and flexibility.
- Listen to, imitate, and improvise sounds, patterns, or songs.
- Listen to storytellers and watch puppet shows.