

HOW TO TURN STORY TIME INTO CONVERSATION TIME

Reading aloud to your child every day is one of the best ways you can prepare them for a lifetime of listening, learning, and talking. But it's not just about the words on the page when you're reading. When you open a book, you open a world of listening and language opportunities to explore. And this can be critically helpful when teaching a young child who is deaf or hard of hearing to listen and talk. Let's explore ways you can open a book and fall into a conversation with your child.

Hi, I'm Dr. Teresa Caraway with Hearing First. We're here to help and support families just like yours who have a child with hearing loss. We want to empower you as your child learns to listen, talk, read, and thrive just like kids with typical hearing.

Reading aloud builds your child's vocabulary, strengthens their memory skills, sparks creativity and ideas, inspires their learning and reading as they get older, and creates a unique opportunity for you to have a conversation with your child. Those conversations may start on the page, but they go deeper and beyond the book. When your child's favorite and most important person in their world, that's you, shows interest and curiosity, you're reinforcing that their thoughts and ideas matter. And of course, for a child who is deaf or hard of hearing, reading and talking about the story helps them grow to be a confident conversationalist. The conversations you have at a young age with your child will prepare them for later friendships and social interactions as they get older.

What are some ways you can spark a conversation from the book you're reading together? Well, it's all in the questions you ask. If you ask a yes or no question, also called a closed-ended question, like, "Did you like this book?" well, you just get a yes or no answer, which really goes nowhere. But when you ask an open-ended question, like, "I loved hearing about this adventure. What was your favorite part?" then, you'll hear more from your child and even learn a little bit about what piqued their interest. You can open the door to a conversation with an open-ended question.

I'm going to use the book "Llama Llama Mad at Mama" to show you and to provide some examples of some questions you might ask. In this book, Mama has to go on lots of errands, and Little Llama has to go with her. And the day gets kind of long, and they have to go lots of places and do lots of things, and Llama doesn't like it very much.

And so in the book, it's "Crash the cart and smash the signs. No more waiting, no more lines. Out goes socks and cheese puffs. Llama Llama, that's enough." And then ask questions like:

- "Oh no. He is very, very mad. Uh oh, how do you think Mama's feeling?"
- "Yeah, I think she's kind of aggravated with him. She is not thinking this is appropriate behavior. Oh, well what do you think Mama will say to Llama?"
- Pause and wait and have your child talk about it, and then talk about, "Oh, have you ever gotten in trouble at the store? How did you feel when you got in trouble? And what did your mommy do?"

All of those are questions that you can ask that take you beyond the book and talk about thoughts and feelings and open a whole conversation with your child. Notice that a lot of those questions were about thoughts and feelings and making predictions. Using intentional thinking and feeling language in conversations builds vocabulary and creates emotional connections and understanding. When you ask these types of questions, you're building that understanding and empathy. This is sometimes referred to as theory of mind.

Reading aloud together and talking through thoughts and emotions helps your child gain new vocabulary words, build conversational skills, understand subtle social and linguistic cues, increase understanding of figurative language and verbal reasoning and critical thinking, have a foundation for strong reading and comprehension skills, and establish and maintain friendships.

The next time you sit down to read together, ask some questions and have a conversation. And if your 15 minutes of reading aloud every day involves mostly talking together about the book, that counts. And if you don't finish the book but you do have a great conversation on just a few pages, well, that's a win. Looking for more reading and book ideas? We have all kinds of great resources for you to download for free. And there's a link below to some of our favorite ones. You can also find a handout with great books for every season, along with listening and spoken language tips that you can practice while you read.

Wherever you are in this journey or however you may be feeling, you are not alone. Hearing First is here to help you every step of the way. Subscribe to the YouTube channel for more helpful videos, and visit HearingFirst.org to learn more. See you next time.