



## Parent's Resources

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## A vignette on how shared reading is used to learn about story plot

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Here is how one teacher reads “There’s an Alligator under My Bed” by Mercer Mayer, to a group of four-year-olds.

### Before Reading

The teacher begins by saying, “Let’s look at the picture on the cover of the book. [Shows a boy in bed with an alligator sticking out beneath] The boy in this story has a big problem. Can anyone guess what that big problem is?”

After the children have made their guesses, the teacher points to the title and says, “The title of this book is ‘There’s an Alligator under my Bed’. So Suzy and Joey were correct in guessing what the boy’s problem is. How do you think the boy will get rid of the alligator?”

When several children have shared their predictions, the teacher begins reading the book aloud.

### During Reading

After reading the first section of the book which introduces the boy’s problem, the teacher pauses and asks, “Do you have any other ideas about how the boy might get rid of the alligator?”

The teacher reads the next two pages, which detail the boy’s plan to leave a trail of bait to the garage, and then pauses to ask the children what the word bait means.

After reading the next section, in which the boy lays out a trail of food, the teacher asks, “What do you think the alligator is going to do?”

Finally, after reading the rest of the story, in which the alligator gets trapped in the garage, the teacher points to the note the boy left on the door to the garage and asks, “What do you think the boy wrote in his note?”

### After Reading

The teacher sparks a discussion of the book by asking several open-ended questions, such as “What did you like best about the story?” and “How would you have gotten rid of that alligator?”

Later, the teacher does a follow-up small group activity – to reinforce a sense of story plot, she helps children sequence a few pictures of the main story events. The older children could rewrite the ending of the story.



## Behaviour modification

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Behaviour modification is a term that everyone has heard of but few can put into practice. The biggest single factor preventing its effective use is emotional involvement. We love our children. Long before the child arrives, we build up a fantasy of what our child will be like and what we will be like as parents.

At about 18 months to 2 years of the child's life we are confronted by a non-conforming child. The child in reality is establishing his own identity (often loudly) and flexing his muscles (throwing temper tantrums).

### Parenting is not just about loving and physical caring – it is also about shaping the child into:

1. A person who will fit into the family
2. A person who can take his/her place in society

Therefore, parenting is about discipline. However, discipline should never be oppressive and crushing but rather, that of setting limits.

Children who engage in behavioural outbursts are often seeking limits. A child sometimes feels uneasy and UNLOVED if the parent is not prepared to take some action.

### Points to understand:

1. Each child is an individual – treat them accordingly. One method of discipline may not work for all children.
2. Be flexible – allow “shades of grey”. If the issue is relatively unimportant, occasionally, allow the child to have a win. An example is the choice of clothes.
3. Decide and define what the problem is. A behavioural problem can be defined as something that is:
  - Disruptive to the child
  - Disruptive to the family

### Occasional temper tantrums would not fall into this definition.

1. Having identified the problem – it often helps to step ‘outside it’. BE Objective! Do not rely on impressions, instead record observations:
  - Time and duration of behavioural outburst
  - Preceding event
  - The trigger incident
  - What happened after it?



## Behaviour modification (Cont.)

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2. Look for other causes, e.g. birth of a baby, loss of a family member through death or separation, moving house, etc.
3. If you still believe it warrants your attention, you then have to decide:
  - Do you have the energy and time to bring about the change?
  - Can you be consistent?
4. Generally – nice things (positive reinforcers such as stickers or any stuff that the child particularly likes as well as praises) will increase a behavioural response (toileting, 'good' behaviour, etc.).
5. Avoid paying attention (yelling, smacking, nagging are still attention) to the disruptive behaviour, instead focus on appropriate behaviour. However, do tell the child what is the expected behaviour. He can't know what is required if he has never been told.

### **Ignoring behaviours, (please note: not those potentially unsafe to child or another), is sometimes the most powerful tool a parent can use.**

1. Go back to the diary – how often and how long is the child engaging in disruptive behaviours? Perhaps, all the child wants is just some quality time (uninterrupted individual devotion). Most children get by on their own if they are given 20 minutes of undivided, individual, quality time!
2. Finally – don't say something if you don't mean it – if you've said it – act on it. Constantly 'threatening' to take action and not acting on it means the child will learn very quickly to disregard what you say.

*Written by **Luci Webb** - An occupational therapist specializing in children with developmental behavioural emotional problems to help us meet the needs of these children.*



## Helping preschool children become readers

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**Reading with children will be most beneficial if parents follow these simple techniques:**

- **Be familiar with the book.** If the book is new, parents should try to read it themselves beforehand.
- **Read slowly but naturally.** Pronouncing the words carefully helps to build children's vocabulary
- **Read with interest.** An expressive voice shows interest and engages the child. Use different voices. This helps children differentiate the characters and their qualities.
- **Use a finger to follow the words.** This shows the connection between spoken and written words. Children will learn to associate sounds with specific letters and letter combinations.
- **Stop reading to talk about the book.** Children want to talk about the pictures, story and characters. If a book is familiar, they might predict what will happen next or imagine different events and endings.
- **Extend the reading.** Reading is enriched when children represent the events or characters through drawing and play-acting. Other ideas include visiting places and doing things that appear in the book or making up stories and games that build on the book's ideas.

Most of the Pre-Nursery and Nursery children will probably not be decoding the print of the storybooks taken home. However, we should bear in mind that children "read" in many ways. Almost all young children "read" the big and yellow M really well. Before they read actual words, children pretend to read. They follow the pictures in a familiar book, tell the story from memory, or make up their own narrative. With lots of exposure to print material, they come to understand basic print concepts, such as turning the pages from front to back, reading from top to bottom and following lines from left to right.

Below is a list of authors and illustrators of books for young children to help you around in your trip to the library.

**Aliki**

**Leo Lionni**

**Wanda Gag**

**Eric Carle**

**Robert Munsch**

**Janet/Allan Ahlberg**

**Tomie dePaola**

**John Burningham**

**Mem Fox**

**Denise Fleming**

**Molly Bang**

**William Steig**

*This is an extract from **Dr Ann S. Epstein's article** (Helping Preschool Children Become Readers: Tips for Parents) to enhance your child's reading experience.*



## How do we praise our children?

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When we praise our children for being ‘good boys/girls’, they do not know what they have done to warrant such an approval. However, we engage in specific praises when we praise them for good character qualities. You could praise your child for being attentive by saying, “I like the way you sat and waited quietly when I was talking to Auntie Kate.” By using the “I Wills”, we help our children to make connections with their daily experiences. Praising achievement often teaches that results are the only things that count. The truth is that both character and achievement are important. Here are some pointers on how to praise character:

- Name a character quality when you praise.
- Don’t compare children. Comparisons build some up by putting others down.
- Avoid absolutes such as “Mary is always attentive”
- Remember, not all children have equal access to mental and physical achievement, but all children have equal access to character.

What you want to say	How you can praise your child
Thank you for being so obedient.	I like the way you follow the instructions so cheerfully.
You are an honest child.	You told me exactly what happened even though you were in the wrong. This is really brave of you.
That’s really nice of you.	Well done for not expecting anything in return from John even though this is the second time you are helping him to wash the dishes.
You are a neat child.	Lovely, you put the stationery back where they belong.

(Extracted from Character First! Information Sheet for Parents)



## How to encourage children's thinking

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Children learn best when we encourage them to invent their own ways to solve problems. When we tell or present knowledge to young children, we stifle their initiative and diminish their confidence. Parents and educators who go beyond worksheet and drill-type methods of teaching will encourage thinking in children.

Williams and Kamii (1986) proposed three ways to encourage thinking in their article "How do children learn by handling objects?" One is to use or create situations that are personally meaningful to children. We think harder about things that matter to us. Passing out enough cups and napkins for friends or family, for example, motivates children much more than doing exercises on worksheets. Likewise, trying to knock over more bowling pins or win more cards than other players also means more than attempting to find the answer to a worksheet problem.

Another way to encourage children to think is to provide opportunities for them to make decisions. When teachers correct children's worksheets, they learn that the teacher is the only one who determines which answers are right. When we allow children to decide on their own who knocked over the most bowling pins, what rule would make the game more fair, or which alternative got more votes, they think much harder than when the teacher decides everything.

A third way to encourage children to think is to provide opportunities for them to exchange viewpoints with their peers. Children think harder when one child says, for example, that the bowling pins are easier to knock over if arranged in a certain way, and another child has a different idea. Worksheets preclude the possibility of this kind of exchange. Children cannot agree, disagree, or attempt to convince others when they do only their own seatwork. On the other hand, they develop intellectually, socially, morally and politically when one child argues, for example, that there has to be a rule specifying a line behind which everybody must stand to roll the ball, and the others retort that such a rule would be unfair.

When the teacher holds all the power of decision making, children become mentally passive because they are prevented from taking a stand, exchanging points of view, and living with the consequences of their own decisions.

Young children cannot think very well when they sit silently. However, it must be warned that movement, manipulation and noise are not necessarily educational.



## The right way to criticise your child

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We have been encouraging parents to praise their children. What if the child is wrong? Do we ever reprimand our children? Dr Martin Seligman in “The Optimistic Child” suggests parents watch the way they criticize children to help them be more resilient. I have adapted an extract from his book to help us understand why we ought to consider the way we talk to our children.

Children learn some of their explanatory style from parents and teachers. They listen to how adults criticize them and absorb the style of the criticism as well as the substance. If you criticize your child as lazy, rather than as not trying hard enough today, your child will believe not only that he is lazy but that his failures come from permanent and unchangeable factors. Children often listen closely to the way parents interpret their own misfortunes and model their style. If you are a pessimist, your child is learning pessimism directly from you.

You must therefore be thoughtful when you criticize your child, or yourself in front of your child, for you are shaping his explanatory style about self-blame. **The first rule is accuracy.** Exaggerated blame produces guilt and shame beyond what is necessary to galvanise the child to change. However, no blame at all erodes responsibility and nullifies the will to change.

**The second rule is that whenever reality allows, you should criticize with an optimistic explanatory style.** When parents unthinkingly criticise their child with permanent and pervasive messages, the child begins to acquire a pessimistic style himself. When they blame changeable and specific causes of the problem, the child begins to learn optimism. If you find your child is at fault, it is important to focus on specific and temporary personal causes, if truth allows, and avoid blaming the child’s character or ability. Here are a few examples of good and bad criticism of a preschooler.



## The right way to criticise your child (Cont.)

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Permanent (Pessimistic)	Changeable (Optimistic)
“Tammy, what’s wrong with you? You are always such a monster!”	“Tammy, you are really misbehaving today. I don’t like it at all.”
“Mrs Tan said you cried the whole time at school. You are such a sensitive child.”	“Mrs Tan said you cried the whole time at school. You’ve been having a hard time being away from me lately.”
“You are a bad boy.”	“You tease your sister too much.”
“She never likes to play with the other kids. She’s so shy.”	“She’s had a hard time joining groups of kids.”
“You kids are so selfish.”	“You kids must share more.”
“You fail again! 1 out of 5 for your spelling again. I guess you are just bad with spelling.”	“Another 1 out of 5?! You need to spend more time learning your spelling instead of learning the day before.”



## Ways to encourage children's resourcefulness and creativity

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Karen Stephens observed in “20 ways to encourage children’s resourcefulness and creativity” that resourcefulness, the ability to meet challenges in a variety of ways, is a by-product of creative intelligence. As children develop resourcefulness, they learn to trust their instincts and unique abilities. They acquire a positive attitude to problem solving. Resourceful children mature into confident and industrious people. Just as important, they tap into the multitude of joys life has to offer.

### Some of the suggested tips to encourage creativity are:

1. Stimulate imaginative, independent thoughts by posing questions. In projects, avoid telling children exactly what to do.
2. Resist perfectionism. Don’t take over a child’s project because you can do it better. Likewise, resist putting finishing touches on a child’s project to make it perfect.
3. Facilitate play; don’t dictate it. Children get a boost from parents getting on the floor and really playing with them. During play, follow the child’s lead. Play should be a dance between the two of you not a concert with you as the sole conductor.
4. Make up cumulative family stories. One person starts a storyline, and then the next has to add on to it, then the next. The zanier the plot the better.
5. Change the end of well-known stories. “What’s another way ‘The Three Little Pigs’ could end?”

(This article is available in its entirety on [www.ChildcareExchange.com](http://www.ChildcareExchange.com))



## What can parents do to help children with spelling?

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### Ways to help children with spelling:

- Encourage children to write often, without censure, to different people – on cards,
- Write to your own children.
- Write notes with messages to tell them that you care when you return home way past their bedtime due to work commitments. Send letters, postcards or emails when you are travelling.
- Write with children.
- Sit at the table and write your letters or emails while the children are writing theirs. Read to children and encourage them to read – books, magazines, poems, newspapers, etc.
- Read signs on shops, read different kinds of printing.

### Homework can be FUN:

- Play Scrabble.
- Find all the objects in your house that start with a certain letter.
- Watch TV commercials and write down remembered words seen on the screen.
- Play Memory.
- Use the Yellow Pages to locate certain information together.
- How many words in a newspaper article end with, e.g. 'tion'?
- Play Boggle.
- How many smaller words can you make out of the letters of the word, 'Singapore'?

NOTE: Scribbles made by young children are beginning writing!



## Young children's thinking skills

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Young children ages three to six are capable of making thoughtful decisions about their behaviour and keen observations about their environment. Increasingly, today's early childhood educators are beginning to shift their focus from academic skills such as reading and mathematics to broader thinking abilities. Many have realized that the foundation upon which children learn to make decisions, regulate their own behaviour, meet complex challenges, and take responsibility for their actions is the ability to think. Research shows that meta-cognition – higher level thinking and problem-solving skills – develops when children are encouraged to plan, predict, pose questions and ponder. Following are some ways to develop young children's metacognition:

### **1. Make planning a regular part of your day.**

Have the child plan what he intends to do on that day. He will begin to think in terms of what he wants to do and how to carry it out. Be sure that it is contextual and not contrived. It must be personally meaningful to the child.

### **2. Ask children questions.**

Be an interested adult - ask open-ended questions to seek genuine information about his plans and how he intends to carry them out. E.g. "How do you intend to make a playground for your mealworm?" Questions about what a child did to obtain trivial information should be asked sparingly.

### **3. Listen attentively to children's plans.**

Be as interactive as possible. We need to share conversations with our children, avoid directing them. By listening actively to what they have to say, we will be able to advise them how to elaborate their ideas and provide alternatives to resolve their questions. This exchange of viewpoints will add dimension to his perception.

### **4. Support, accept, and extend all the ways children express their plans.**

Never force your child to express his plans in a certain way. Do bear in mind that it is your child's ideas, he needs your acceptance to realize his competence. He needs to learn to have more confidence in his own decision-making.



## Young children's thinking skills (Cont.)

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### **5. Write down your children's plans.**

When we record our children's ideas, they get the message that their ideas are valuable. You could key in your child's suggestions of what he intends to do when he visits Dolphin Lagoon. Documentation includes drawing, writing and photography. This will enable our children to be more conscious of the process and value of planning.

### **6. Praise is NOT the only way to support children's learning.**

Praise sometimes puts an end to further interaction since it is affirming. It cuts off the possibilities for children to elaborate their plans. When we remain silent, some children who are used to being praised may be discouraged by the lack of affirmation from the adult. Other strategies include listening, asking questions, commenting and recording their ideas.

(Part of this article is adapted from Ann Epstein's "How Planning and Reflection Develop Young Children's thinking skills", 2003)

