

TOP

Tips on parenting



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Reading Aloud Helps Early Literacy Development

by Dr. Zelda McMurtry

Reading aloud is truly a gift we give our children. Reading aloud is not a frill. It is not just to reward children. Reading aloud a few minutes every day is a very effective way to form a close attachment between child and parent. As parents, we need to read to our children during infancy, as toddlers, preschoolers, and into their school years. The following are helpful suggestions that parents can keep in mind when they read aloud to their children.

INFANTS

Reading aloud should start as soon as a baby is born and continue throughout the lifetime. Reading aloud encourages language development. Starting early is great, but it is never too late to begin reading aloud to our children. Reading aloud stimulates all the senses, seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, and even tasting as babies chew on books. Turning sturdy pages helps babies develop pincher muscles. Select books with brightly colored pictures with solid backgrounds. Board books and cloth books allow babies to have "hands-on" experiences with books. Some examples of good books for babies include:

- *Goodnight Moon*, Margaret Wise Brown (1947) Harper & Row
- *A Color of His Own*, Leo Lionni (1975) Random House Children's Books, Random House or Scholastic
- *Pat the Bunny*, Pat Kunhardt (1940 renewed 1968) Golden Books Publishing

TODDLERS

Daily reading aloud helps the brain grow by aiding in the growth of language, listening skills, knowledge, and vocabularies. Books that have rhymes and predictable words toddlers can remember are usually the best. Select books with simple concepts, with simple pictures to name. Toddlers enjoy books with simple, clear, and colorful artwork. Pop-up books and flap books give the toddler who is in the "I" stage an opportunity to discover the secrets on each page.

- *Spot Goes to the Farm*, Eric Hill (1987) Penguin Group
- *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?*, Bill Martin, Jr. (1967 renewed 1970) Henry Holt and Company
- *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, Beatrix Potter (1902) Penguin Group

PRESCHOOLERS

Read books with believable characters. Characters that we would enjoy having our child

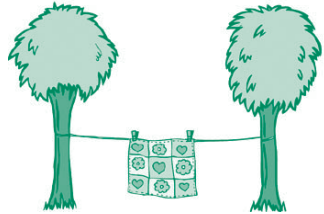
"Reading aloud helps children develop vocabularies, build background knowledge, and understand concepts of print and story."



activity corner

Build an Obstacle Course

Choose materials for your child to climb over, under, or through to build an obstacle course for your child in your back yard.



Materials:

Items to climb over:

- a lawn chair
- a child sized chair
- a plastic child size table
- a foam cushion

Items to climb under:

- a picnic table
- an adult size chair
- a clothes line

Items to climb through:

- a hula hoop
- an old tire
- a large box

Put out fewer items for young children and more challenging items for older children. Use the words over, under, and through as the child moves around the course. As the child runs the obstacle course he will be getting plenty of exercise and learning the concepts of over, under, and through.

Reading Aloud Helps Early Literacy Development

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play with, or that we would not mind inviting to our home. Hearing the same story over and over allows a child to gain a sense of mastery of the story and an understanding that stories make sense. Children need to hear hundreds and hundreds of stories before they learn to read. Hearing many, many stories helps them learn the structure of stories. Learning the structure of stories helps them comprehend the stories they will one day read on their own.

- *Time for Bed*, Mem Fox (1993) Harcourt Brace and Company
- *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge*, Mem Fox (1984) Kane/Miller Book Publishers
- *Miss Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten*, Joseph Slate (1996) Dutton Children's Books

YOUNG SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

Don't read just any book. Choose books wisely. Reading-aloud time is precious. We must use it wisely. Reading aloud is an opportunity to read picture books and short chapter books with characters that learn how to handle problems and cope with difficulties.

- *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*, Judith Viorst (1972) Atheneum Publishers.

- *Stop Picking on Me*, Pat Thomas (2000) Barron's Educational Series, inc.
- *Missing May*, Cynthia Rylant (1992) Scholastic, Inc.

As we talk about books with children, we help them make connections to other books, and make connections to events in our lives. We must be readers ourselves. Our children must see us reading for pleasure as well as for information.

CONCLUSION

Reading aloud helps children develop vocabularies, build background knowledge, and understand concepts of print and story. It stimulates oral language, and models for children how to express themselves, connect with others, make sense of their world and develop lifelong readers. Mem Fox advocates, "If every parent and every adult caring for a child read aloud a minimum of three stories a day to the children in their lives, we could wipe out illiteracy within one generation."

~Zelda McMurtry is an early childhood education instructor at Arkansas State University. Her research interests include reading, read alouds, and constructivism in early childhood classrooms.



FALL IN LEAVES

by Dr. Anne Tapp

Leaves. For most adults this time of year, the word means an added chore. Rewind to a time when turning leaves gave a sense of wonder as well as adventure. To a time when verbs like jumping or collecting superseded raking. You can get those feelings back when encouraging your children to appreciate the season.

Most people think that leaves change color because of the temperature change. This has less to do with Jack Frost than it does with the length of the day. Most of the colors you see in the fall leaves existed in the leaf all along. They are masked by the great amount of green coloring, chlorophyll. The change in daylight hours encourages the breakdown of chlorophyll, the green color fades, and the yellow and orange colors become visible to give the leaves their fall splendor. The bright reds and purples are made mostly in the fall when glucose is trapped in the leaves. Sunlight and the cool nights of autumn turn this glucose into a red color. <http://www.sciencemadesimple.com/leaves.html>

Heading out into nature is a good way to soak up the colors of the season and enjoy the outdoors before the cold weather really sets in. Walking through the woods, fields, or even a park in the city gives an opportunity to witness the changing landscape up close. It's also a great way to come together after a busy day.

Collecting leaves can be a motivating science experience as well as provide the means for some family activities. Use a leaf identification site, such as the *Autumn Leaf Scrapbook* <http://mbgnet.mobot.org/sets/temp/leaves/> to classify your loot. You can also press pairs of like leaves between paper towels within a book to flatten and then adhere to index cards to use for a game of leaf concentration or a fall version

of go fish. Place an odd leaf in the mix to have a deck for Old Maid.

You can maintain the brilliant colors of leaves by preserving them. Bring a mixture of two parts water and one part glycerin (available at most drug and farm supply stores) to a boil in a saucepan. Pour the solution into a heat-proof container. Submerge some brightly-colored leaves into the solution with a wooden spoon. Keep the container in a cool, dark place until there is a slight change in tint. Remove and blot your leaves dry with a paper towel.

Remember the pressing of fall leaves between wax paper? Your children will enjoy this as much as you did. These can make great placemats and bookmarks. Lightly painting the back of leaves and pressing them onto paper makes a beautiful piece of art.

If you have your own carpet of leaves in your yard, there are ways to make the experience a bit more enjoyable. Rake a pathway or maze through your yard. Hide small trinkets within a pile of leaves for interested scavengers to find. This old standby is always a hit. Ask the family helpers to help gather the leaves into a large pile and jump in.

Appreciate the season and all it has to offer. Enjoy the sense of wonder and adventure falling leaves bring.

Suggested literature to accompany your fall adventures:

NONFICTION:

I Am a Leaf by Marzollo and Moffatt, ages 4 – 8 ~ Rhyme and repetition are used when taking readers through the life cycle of a leaf within the four seasons.

Why Do Leaves Change Color? by Maestro, ages 4 – 8 ~ Concepts like pigment, photosynthesis, and chlorophyll are explained in child-friendly terms. Ideas for leaf activities are included.

Autumn Leaves by Robbins, ages 4 – 8 ~ This colorful photo-essay of an autumn nature walk features varied leaves and their corresponding trees.

FICTION:

Leaf Man by Ehlert, ages 4 – 8 ~ Photos of leaves are creatively used to tell the story of a traveling leaf man.

Red Leaf, Yellow Leaf by Ehlert, ages 4 – 8 ~ A variety of materials depict the life of a Sugar Maple.

It's Fall by Glaser and Swan, ages 4 – 8 ~ Three-dimensional, cut paper artwork helps to celebrate and give detail to the fall season.

Fall Leaves Fall! by Hall and Halpern, ages 4 – 8 ~ Children enjoy the wonder of autumn and all the fun it brings.



~Dr. Anne Tapp is an Associate Professor at Saginaw Valley State University. She specializes in curriculum, technology, and science education at the early childhood and elementary levels. She is a frequent presenter at national and international conferences and has authored several professional articles.





POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION

by Elizabeth Pantley, author of *Gentle Baby Care* and *The No-Cry Sleep Solution*

QUESTION: *I know that it's normal to have the "baby blues" right after you have a baby, but my son is six weeks old. I thought everything would be wonderful by now and I would be so in love with my baby. I thought mothering would come easily. It's not that way at all! I can't sleep, even when he's sleeping. I feel hollow inside, like the real me is gone. Sometimes I cry for hours; other times, I feel angry enough to explode. Life feels like an endless amusement park ride, and sometimes I just want to get off. Why am I such a terrible mother?*

LEARN ABOUT IT

You're not a terrible mother! You are a mother who is suffering from a condition known as postpartum depression, a condition that is treatable. While as many as 80% of mothers experience a temporary and mild condition referred to as the baby blues, up to 15% of women have the more severe reaction you're experiencing. Having PPD doesn't mean that you have done something wrong, or that something is wrong with you; it is an illness and it can be cured. Once you learn more about what's causing your despondent emotions and take some steps toward treatment, you'll be on the road to finding yourself again and enjoying your baby.

WHAT IS POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION?

PPD is a medical condition — a specific type of depression that occurs within the first few months after childbirth. It is caused by the biochemical and hormonal changes that happen in the body after pregnancy and birth ... nothing that is within your control.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION?

While PPD affects all women differently, a few typical symptoms can help your physician make the diagnosis. You probably are not experiencing everything on the following list, and the degree of symptoms may range from mild to severe, but if a number of these apply to you, you may be suffering from PPD.

Symptoms of postpartum depression may include but are not limited to:

- Fear of "losing control"
- Frequent crying or tearfulness
- Insomnia or sleepiness
- Lack of energy

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Postpartum Depression

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- Loss of pleasure in activities you normally enjoy
- Difficulty doing typical daily chores
- Loss of appetite
- Feelings of sadness and despair
- Feelings of guilt, panic, or confusion
- Feelings of anger or anxiety
- Extreme mood swings
- Memory loss
- Overconcern for baby
- Feeling of “losing control”
- Lack of interest in sex
- Worrying that you may hurt your baby
- A desire to escape from your baby or your family
- Withdrawal from social circles and routines
- Thoughts about hurting yourself

Do this for yourself and your baby.

If you suffer from extreme degrees of any of these symptoms, particularly thoughts about hurting yourself or your baby, or if you have additional physical symptoms such as hallucinations, confusion, or paranoia, then please call a doctor today. **NOW.** Your condition requires immediate medical care. If you can't make the call, then please talk to your partner, your mother or father, a sibling, or close friend and ask them to help you arrange for help. Do this for yourself and for your baby. If you can't talk about it, rip this page out and hand it to someone close to you. It's that important. You do not have to feel this way.

WHAT CAN A DOCTOR DO ABOUT POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION?

As with any form of depression, help is available and only as far away as your healthcare provider—contact your ob/gyn or midwife to start with, if that's most comfortable for you. She can help you get the professional care you need from someone who has experience dealing with this condition. In the longer term, it's important that your therapy take place with a professional who has experience in treating PPD; the malady is different from other forms of depression, and it is very specifically related to your role as a new mother.

PARENT TIP

“In the time it takes you to read this chapter, you could set up an appointment with a doctor. Remember, this is a medical problem and it can be serious; for your sake, for your baby, and for all those who love you, you must make that call. With help, you will regain your life and your perspective.”

Vanessa, mother of Kimmy (12), Tyler (10), Rachel (5), and Zachary (3)

A visit to a doctor for the symptoms you're feeling is nothing to fear. Your condition is something your doctor has seen before—so you need not feel at all self-conscious. As for treatment, there are a variety of options, depending on how severe your symptoms are. Your doctor will evaluate your condition and may suggest medication, such as antidepressants. (Make sure that you let him know if you are breastfeeding so the proper medication can be prescribed.) In addition, he will tell you that therapy and support are critical for recovery.

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT PPD?

The first step you can take is to understand that you have an illness that requires action on your part so you can heal. Forgive me for repeating this, but it is important: Take that first step and call a doctor. In addition, the following things can help you begin to feel better right away:

Talk to someone. Whom do you trust? Whom do you feel comfortable talking to? This might be your spouse or partner, it might be your mother, your sister or brother, or a friend. It can really help to share your feelings with someone who cares about you. Even if you feel you can't talk specifically about PPD, just discuss your feelings and your new role as a mother and its effects on you.

Read books about baby care and parenting. Knowledge is power. Reading may help you feel more confident, which in turn will help you feel more in control of

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Postpartum Depression

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your situation. It will also give you the knowledge you'll need to ward off the unwanted advice or criticism that can come your way during the early months of parenting, and that can be especially hard to take when you are feeling depressed.

Join a support group. PPD support groups allow mothers who are dealing with depression to talk with others who have similar feelings. A list at the end of this section can help you find a group in your area. You might also call your health care provider, your local hospital, or your church for information. While PPD support groups are an excellent choice, any group for new mothers in which you can share your feelings about motherhood can help you feel better about yourself. Choose your support group with care, as you'll want to be around people who support your parenting decisions. Being with a group who criticizes or questions your mothering choices will make you feel worse, not better. Conversely, spending your time with like-minded people will boost your self-confidence and help you feel more confident as a mother. This idea shouldn't be seen as a cure, but rather one part of the process of recovery.

Accept help from others. If anyone offers to help you—whether it is to take your baby for a walk, cook a meal, or drive your older kids to sports practice—accept! Learn to say yes.

You don't have to do everything to be a good mother. It's natural for human beings to lean on each other, so go ahead and do a little more leaning.

Get some extra sleep. Put your efforts to get your baby to sleep through the night on hold right now; this will come in time. Forget about the clock. Just sleep—both of you—when-ever you can. Extra sleep will help you feel better.

Relax your standards. This is not the time to worry about a spotless house, gourmet meals, the corporate ladder, or your manicure. Try to stick to the basics and concentrate on yourself and your baby.

Get some fresh air. When possible, put your baby in the sling or the stroller and take a walk. The exercise and open spaces will help you feel more energized. Try to work a daily stroll into your schedule. If you have older children, walk them to school. If the weather isn't suitable for outdoor walking, then drive to a shopping mall for an indoor walk.

Feed yourself healthy foods. You can eat properly without much effort. Focus on fresh fruits and vegetables, and simple but nutritious meals. And eat frequently. Going long stretches without food wreaks havoc on your system. Simple snacks like an apple with peanut butter, a bagel, or

yogurt with cottage cheese are easy to prepare and prevent your blood sugar from dipping and adding to your feelings of depression. Continue to take vitamins, and drink plenty of water.

Love yourself. You are going to be okay. Take it one step at a time...but do take steps (such as those outlined in this section). With help and time, you'll develop a refreshing and healthy outlook on your new role as a mother.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

BOOKS

This Isn't What I Expected: Overcoming Postpartum Depression, by Karen Kleiman and Valerie Davis Raskin (Bantam Books, 1994)

Beyond The Blues: Prenatal and Postpartum Depression, A Treatment Manual, by Shoshana Bennett and Pec Indman (Moodswings Press, 2002)

The No-Cry Sleep Solution: Gentle Ways to Help Your Baby Sleep Through the Night, by Elizabeth Pantley (McGraw-Hill, 2002)

WEB SITES

Pacific Post Partum Support Society:
www.postpartum.org

Depression After Delivery, Inc.:
www.depressionafterdelivery.com

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TO LOCATE A SUPPORT GROUP

Postpartum Support International: www.chss.iup.edu/postpartum

Postpartum Education for Parents: www.sbpep.org

La Leche League Support Groups: www.la lecheleague.org/WebIndex.html

~Excerpted with permission by McGraw-Hill from *Gentle Baby Care* by Elizabeth Pantley, copyright 2003, <http://www.pantley.com/elizabeth>



question

corner

"How can I get my 4-year-old to stop sucking on her thumb?"

- Brian in Utah

When children are young, they often suck their thumbs for comfort and most children gradually stop sucking on their own. However, there are steps you can take when a 4-year-old child is a habitual thumb sucker. You can help reduce the child's thumb sucking by using a sticker chart. Before you begin using the chart, tell the child that you understand that she enjoys the thumb-sucking, but that thumb sucking can hurt her teeth. You would like to work with her to decrease the thumb sucking. Every time she does not suck her thumb for ten minutes, you will give her a sticker she can put on the chart. Use the chart for about one hour a day. Praise the child and tell her how proud you are even before the ten minutes are up. If the child is able to stop sucking her thumb for ten minutes give her a sticker. If she cannot, say "Let's try again." If after a few tries, the child still cannot stop sucking for an entire ten minutes, try five minutes instead. At the end of the hour, tell the child that the game is over for today and that you will play it again tomorrow. If your daughter is sucking her thumb because she's frustrated or bored, be sure the child has many activities that she can enjoy participating in throughout the day. She may also be sucking her thumb for sensory stimulation. Perhaps providing your child with other sensory experiences may decrease her need for thumb sucking. Allow the child to play in the sand, water, or mud. A child will not be able to put her thumb in her mouth if her hands are busy. At all times during the day provide praise, a pat, or hug when you notice the child not sucking her thumb. Although it will take some time, you should begin to see a gradual decline of thumb sucking within a couple of weeks.



~Heidi Malloy, Ph.D., is an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology at Metropolitan State University.

question corner features questions posed by parents to early childhood experts who provide brief responses in this newsletter. If you have any questions you would like answered, please send e-mail to eejcenter@cc.usu.edu or mail to EEJ Center for Early Childhood Education, Utah State University, 6705 Old Main Hill, Logan, UT 84322-6705.



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