

Reading aloud to children: 7 steps to making it magical



“Reading aloud not only nurtures children’s pleasure in reading, it offers them models of how a book should sound and feel, helping them develop expressive reading in their own heads. Reading aloud to young children prompts them to listen actively and process more challenging texts and vocabulary than they could possibly achieve on their own”.

So settle down with your child, find a great book and take your time exploring it together. Here’s seven steps you can take to make reading aloud a really valuable experience:

1. Find a brilliant book

Quality picture books lend themselves to reading aloud to young children. They often have rich rhythms and rhymes, stunning illustrations and engaging characters with whom we can all connect. If there’s time try and read it to yourself first so you know how it flows.

2. Choose a comfy spot

Turn off the TV and your phone and settle down together, perhaps with your child’s favourite cuddly toy to listen in too! It is often said readers are raised on their parents’ laps, so get comfortable and hold the book so you can both see it. This is your special time together.

3. Begin the journey

Read the title aloud and the author’s name and spend some time just looking together at the cover together, you might point things out, wonder aloud what’s going to happen to a particular character but let your child comment too. If you wish read the back cover blurb too, tempting your child with the snippets offered and chatting about what the book appears to be about.

4. Read, relax and respond

Open it up unhurriedly and begin to read the first few pages of the text, reading slowly and expressively before you pause, so you've begun to tempt your child in to the tale. Relax; there is no right way to do this! Being responsive to your child's reactions is important. If they comment, ask questions or are looking closely at a picture, pause and respond, their relaxed attentive involvement is a joy to see and deserves your encouragement.

5. Talk about the book

Informal book talk is key to enjoying a story. Pause between reading it aloud and take the time to chat about what's happening, the behaviour of the characters, what might happen next and so on. Make connections to people and events in your child's life as this will help them make personal sense of the story.

Far from being a one-sided experience, reading aloud should be interactive - packed with young children's observations, responses to the text and significant book blether.

6. Bring the book to life

Don't rush, but do keep the flow of the story going (there will be plenty of time to examine it further on a 2nd/3rd reading!), so whilst at times you'll stop to chat, at others, hold the telling space and have fun! Add in noises, emphasis, intonation and colour by using your voice to bring the book to life. No-one is watching and your child will enjoy it more and join in with your actions, facial expressions and any repeating lines.

7. Finish with space to think

As you reach the last page, slow down and let the story reach its end with emphasis. Then pause, looking intently at the page yourself to think about the tale, don't rush to asking questions, allow some thinking space and let your child guide you. They may choose to look back through it, may demand it 'again!' or may scramble down in search of another. There's no need to discuss it, but if they're looking through it they may want to talk more about it