

Tips to Encourage Literacy in the Playspace

Much like any interaction with young children, getting children to read is all about your approach. If you approach reading as an exciting activity, books will be fun and exciting for children.

In play settings such as the Playspace, children are often attracted to the most colorful, exciting toys and activities they can find - and books might not always fill the bill. You, as a Playspace Activity Leader, have the power to change that by approaching books with enthusiasm and making reading into a fun, playful, and engaging experience.

One strategy for encouraging literacy in children is called “dialogic reading.” The strategy was developed by early childhood literacy researchers and is successfully implemented in early childhood classroom settings. Stated simply, **dialogic reading** is an interactive, conversation-style approach to reading. Rather than the traditional approach to reading, where the adult reads to the child, this approach requires the adult to ask some specific questions to pique the child’s interest in the content of the book. Here are some simple tips for implementing a more conversational style of reading in your Playspace, using examples from one of our favorite books: *The Cat in the Hat*.

- **Prompt children to complete the end of a sentence you are reading.** Challenging children in this way who have not yet started reading, helps them to understand the structure of a book and may also help them learn about word relationships such as rhyming.

For example: “The sun did not shine, it was too wet to play. So we sat in the house all that cold, cold, wet _____.”

- **Ask children to recall** what happened in a book that you have already read with them, or ask them to remember what happened on a previous page.

For example, you might ask: “What happened in the beginning of *The Cat in the Hat* that made Sally and her brother so sad?”

- **Point to pictures in the book and ask children to describe what is happening in those pictures.** This helps children express themselves using words and pay attention to important details.

It’s best to ask open-ended questions, such as: “Can you tell me what’s happening in this picture?”

- **Ask children to identify objects in the book you’re reading** using “wh-” questions (such as, “Who”, “What”, “When”, and “Where”). These questions help to enhance children’s vocabulary.

For example, pointing to a picture of the Cat, you might ask: “What is that?” Or, for younger children who might need more context to answer the question: “What kind of animal is that?”

- **Help children relate the book you are reading to their own lives** by using props from around the Playspace or referring to other things you have done with the children.

For example, you might ask: “On this page, Sally and her brother are sad that they can’t go outside because it’s raining. Do you ever have to stay inside because of the weather?”

For more resources about dialogic reading approaches, tips, and activities, check out some of these websites:

- http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/alsc/ecrr/workshopsab/workshopmaterials/handoutseccr/ta_lkerhandouts.pdf
- <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/400>