

Bring On the Books

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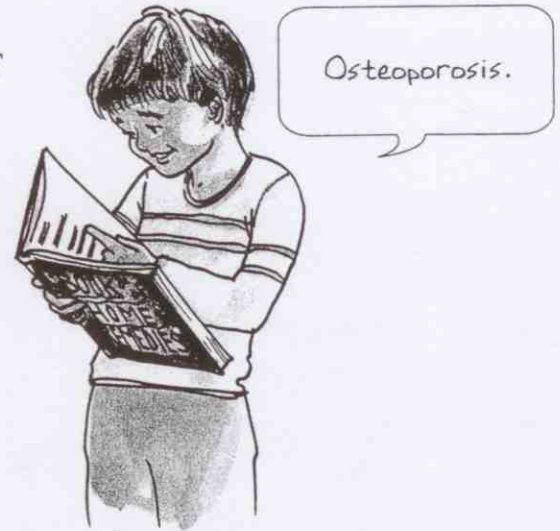
Some children can pour over a book for hours while others may only glance at the cover. However, all children who like to look at pictures or printed words tend to enjoy books. Unlike the spoken word, the pictures and print do not disappear after they're read. They remain on the page so that your child can make sense of what he is seeing *and* hearing. A good book can also be read many times over. Each time your child hears a story, he understands more and more as the book's language becomes familiar.

Some children with ASD have a precocious ability to read and are often more interested in looking at words than at pictures. Yet even though they can recognize long and difficult words, they don't always understand what these words mean.

In this chapter we will look at how books help your child understand his world and encourage him to communicate. We will also see how you can use the printed word to give your child information and a new way to express himself.

When you read a book with your child, a lot of learning happens:

- Your child discovers the pleasure of sharing a book with you. Book reading offers you and your child the opportunity to make a connection and find enjoyment in two-way communication.
- Your child learns new words and sees words that he already knows used in a new context.
- Books encourage your child to think beyond the words written on the page, as you help him imagine how characters feel or what might happen next.
- Your child may discover another way to communicate through the printed word.



Alexander loves to read words, but he doesn't always understand what they mean.

Reading Together

Choose the Right Books

(See the reference section for a short list of recommended books.)

Take into consideration what your child does with a book, his understanding, his interests and the kinds of pictures that are meaningful for him. You may find that the best books have colourful pictures and text that relates directly to the picture under which it appears. Books for preschoolers usually have a couple of large pictures of familiar objects on each page, but your child may like more detailed pictures as well. Some children enjoy books with pictures of their special interests, such as animals or characters from favourite TV shows.

Remember that even books written for older children have wonderful illustrations. With a little reworking on your part, these books can be transformed into the right book for your child. (See "Read the Right Way" for guidelines on how to modify books for your child's stage.)

Cardboard, cloth and soft vinyl books

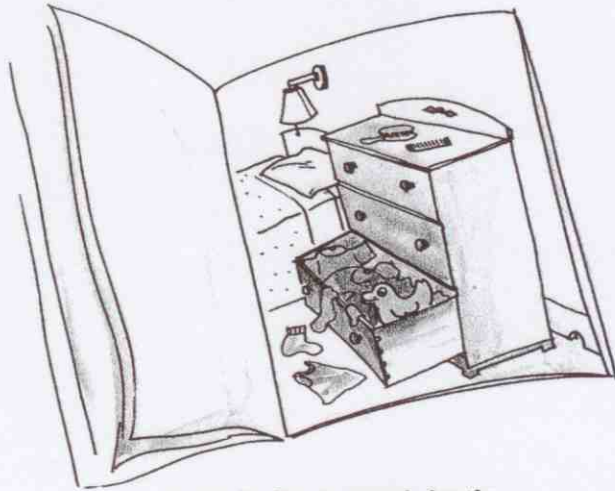
If your child prefers to chew on books or tear pages, choose books made from durable materials that will last while he learns how to use books the way he's supposed to.

Books that are good for pointing to and naming things

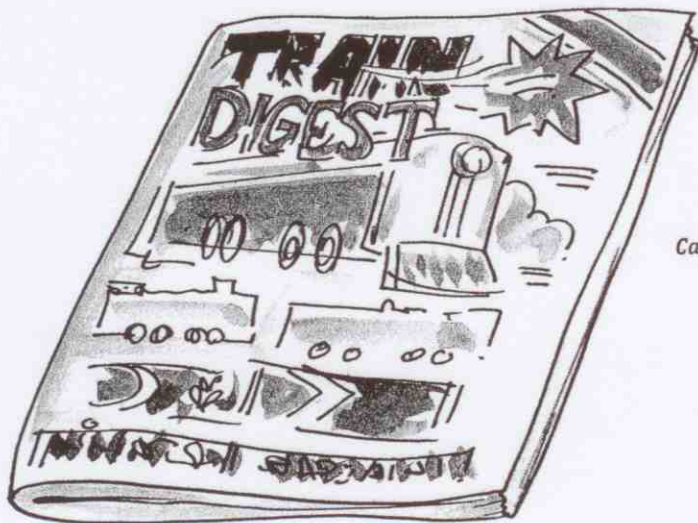
Books that encourage pointing and labelling usually have one or two brightly coloured pictures or photographs of things that your child is familiar with on each page. These books can be about the alphabet, numbers, animals, everyday items, like food and toys, and daily routines. Your child may like books with hidden objects in the pictures. It can be fun to search for the tiny mouse or little ducky hiding on the page! And don't forget about store catalogues. If your child is fascinated by trains, he may appreciate a train catalogue (available at hobby stores) more than any other book.



Your child may like books with one or two realistic pictures on each page.



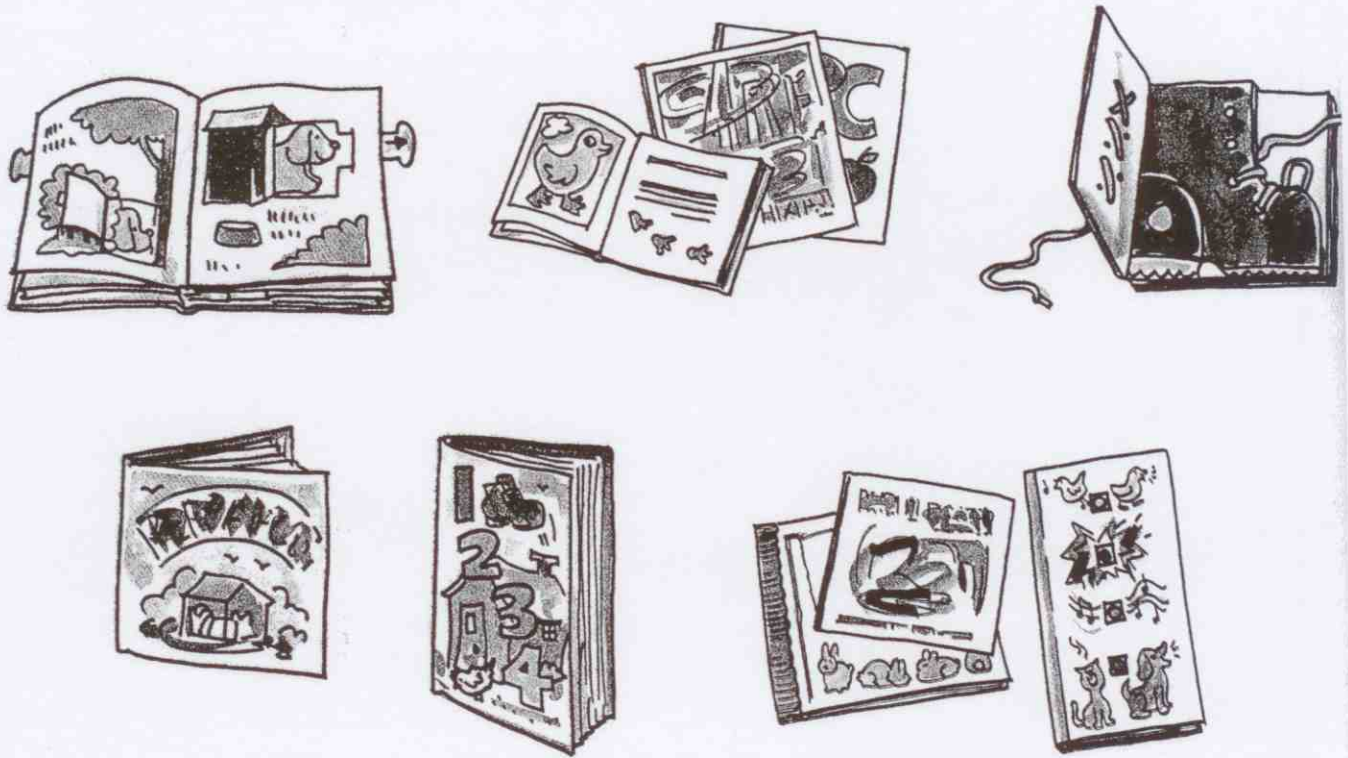
It can be fun to search for the hidden ducky together.



Catalogues can be favourites.

Interactive books

These books provide things for your child to do even if he isn't yet talking or pointing to pictures. Children like books with flaps to lift, buttons to push and fuzzy fabrics to touch. Long before they recognize the meaning of the pictures under the flaps or the sounds that the buttons create, they learn that books can be fun.



Predictable books

Predictable books have repetitive words and phrases. It's much easier to recall something said ten times than something said once. Books that repeat key phrases, such as "I see," "I like" or "Who is that?" are especially useful for your child. Predictable books are also ideal for a child who enjoys music because they have their own rhythms and rhymes. A good example of a repetitive and predictable rhyming book is *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* by Bill Martin Jr.

Simple story books

As your child's understanding increases, choose books that have a simple plot with a beginning, middle and end. At first, the stories should be about things your child is familiar with, such as a visit to a friend's house, a familiar daily routine or a problem he is likely to encounter. Later, introduce story books that encourage your child to use his imagination and think about unfamiliar things, like scary monsters or life on a farm.

Choose books to help your child generalize words he knows

Once your child learns a new word in one situation, it is often difficult for him to transfer it to another place. To help your child generalize, choose books that emphasize words he's already learned in People Games, songs and daily routines.



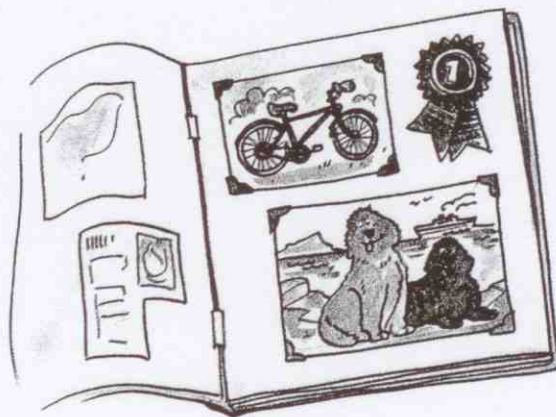
First, Kelsi learns the word "up" in a People Game with her father.



Then she sees that not only little girls but also balloons can go "up."

Create a book just for your child

Homemade books appeal to children at all stages. You can make scrapbooks with photos of family, friends and pets or with pictures cut out from magazines or toy catalogues. If your child understands much of what you say to him, you can write a special "Personal Story" just for him. A Personal Story gives your child information that will help him understand confusing or new situations, such as a visit to the Doctor's. (For more about Personal Stories see Chapter 7, page 239.)



Most children like to look at realistic pictures of themselves, their family and other familiar things.

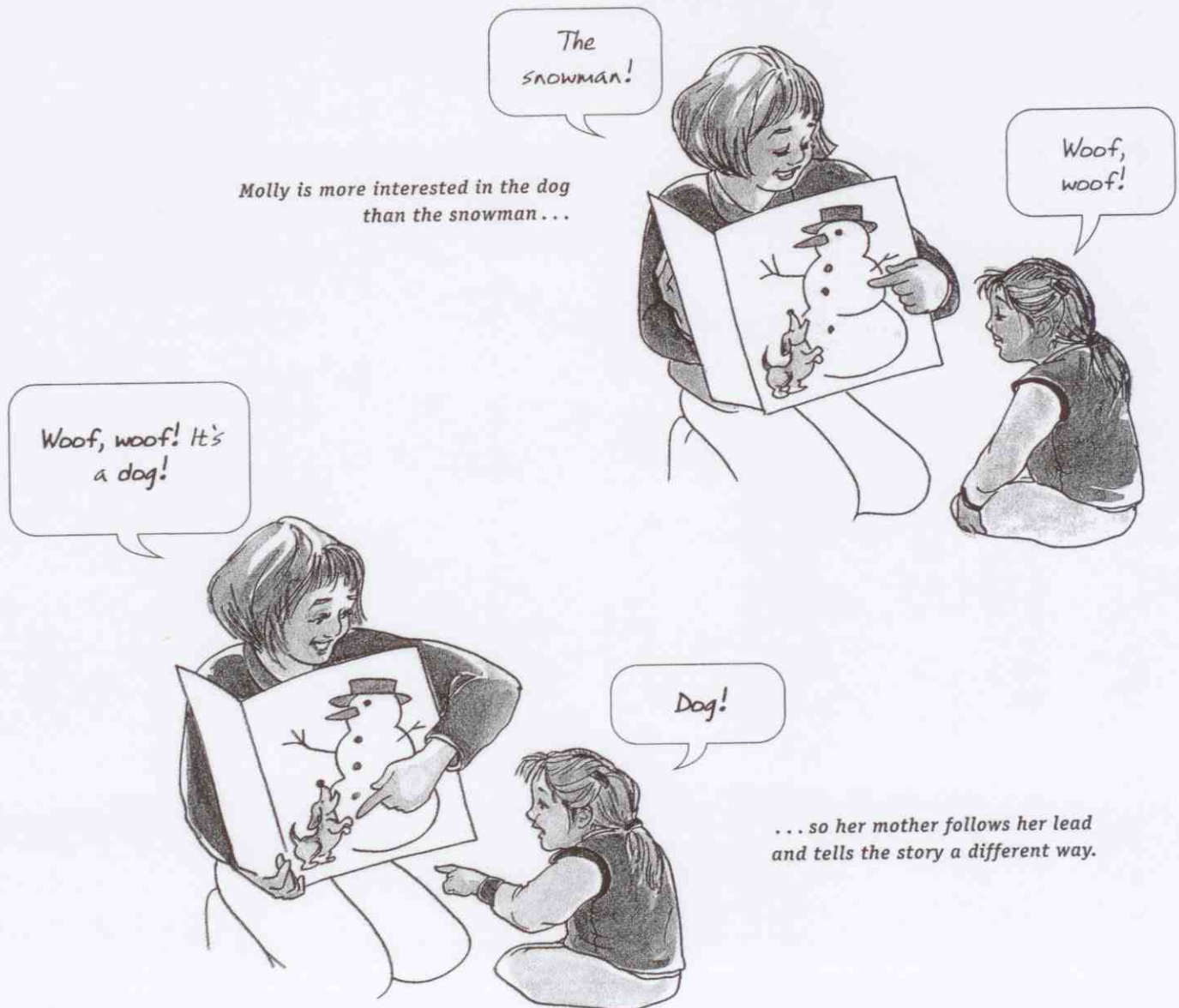
Read the Right Way

Get your child hooked on books by creating interest and excitement

Think of yourself as an entertainer, and your reading as an award-winning performance. You have to be more interesting to your child than the things that might distract him.

Follow your child's lead

Sometimes the part of the book that interests your child most is not the part that you're reading to him. When this happens, it's best to abandon your plan and follow his lead. Once you notice what your child's looking at, include his interest by labelling the picture that captures his attention and making this picture a part of the story you're reading.



Say Less and Stress, Go Slow and Show!

All the communication strategies that you have read about in this book come into play when you read to your child. The rhyme you learned in Chapter 6 – say less, and stress, go slow and show – tells you exactly how to read to your child so that he will learn to love books, understand what you are reading and participate in the book at his level.

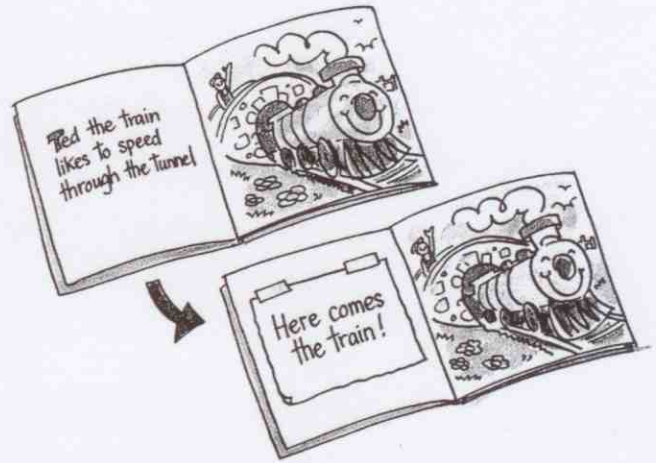


Say less

Simplify and shorten what is written

If the text is too long and complicated for your child to understand, don't read it exactly as it is written. Depending on your child's stage, reduce three-word sentences to one clear label or fifteen-word sentences to three words. For example, if the book reads, "Once upon a time, long ago, there was a little girl named Goldilocks," change it to, "That's a girl. The girl's name is Goldilocks. That's Goldilocks."

You can actually rewrite the text on a piece of paper, either by hand or on the computer, and then paste the new, simplified version right over the original, more complicated one. This not only gives your child the visual cues that match your words, but also helps you to "read" the book the same way each time.



If the pictures are right but the words aren't, simply change the words.



Stress

Be animated and expressive

Use your voice and facial expressions to create excitement. Be an actor. Use sound effects – moo like a cow or take on the scary voice of a monster. Use the book as an excuse to let the "kid" in you come out.

This father captures his child's attention with animation and lots of expression.



Exaggerate key words

Make the important words stand out by using a loud or soft voice, depending on the word you are saying. For example, in the children's classic, *Goodnight Moon*, the word "hush" occurs frequently. If you say it in a whisper each time, the word becomes much more meaningful and memorable to your child.

This mother uses the same voice and intonation whenever she says the word, "hush."

**Put the key word at the end of your sentence**

Most good children's books put the important words in just the right place – at the ends of sentences. When words come at the end of a line, they are easy for your child to remember and provide a consistent place for him to fill in the blanks. If the words aren't in the right place, you can always rewrite the book so that they are.

**Go slow**

Give your child an opportunity to take in what he is seeing and hearing. Your child's attention may move from one thing on the page to another. Give him time to take in the information and to match what you say to what he sees.

Pause between words and phrases

Your pauses are very important. They highlight your child's expected turn and let him know when he should take it.

Be natural

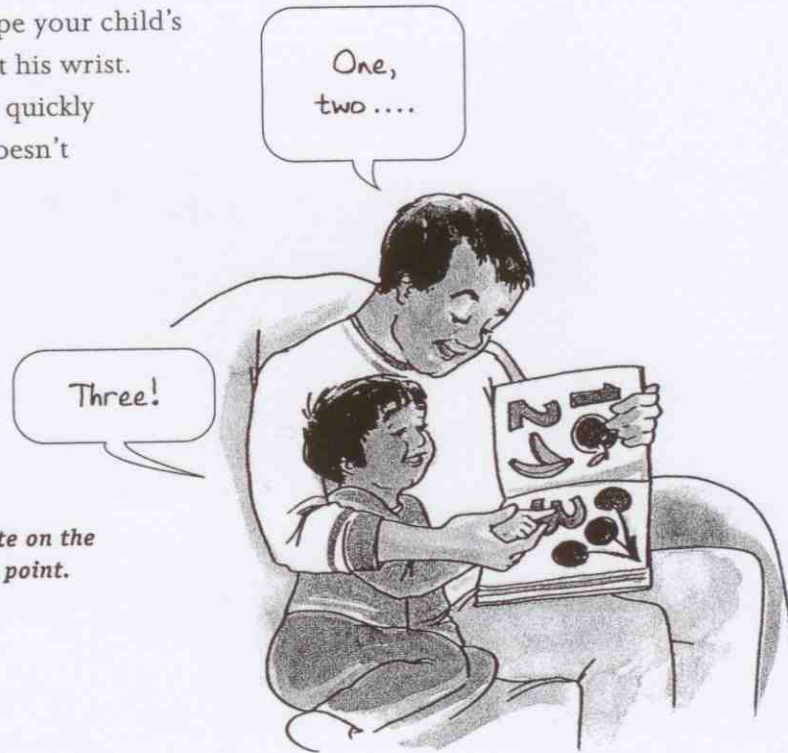
It's important to read slowly, but never so slowly that the meaning or rhythm of the book is unclear.



Show

Show with pictures

Don't expect your child to look at the pictures in a book just because they are in front of him. You need to help him focus on the pictures by pointing to them as you talk about them. Some children start to point to the pictures on their own or will guide your finger to do the pointing for them. For those who don't, give some physical assistance to get the pointing going. You may need to shape your child's finger into a point, or simply support his wrist. But remember to fade out your help as quickly as possible so that your child doesn't become dependent on it.



David's father helps David concentrate on the numbers by shaping his finger into a point.

Show with the printed word

Not all children are ready to look at the printed word. But if your child shows an interest in print, draw his attention to it by running either his or your finger under the words as you read them.

Show with actions and gestures

Make the words come alive for your child by acting out their meanings with actions and gestures. For example, if a character in the book is swimming, make large swimming motions with your arms; if a character is cold, hug yourself as if you are trying to keep warm.

Show with real objects

If you can match some of the pictures in the book to real objects, your child has another way to understand what you're talking about. Whether real objects are helpful to your child depends on his understanding and interest in objects.