

Adapted and Distributed in
2003 by

The Massachusetts
Department of Education
350 Main Street
Malden, MA 02148
781.338.3000

With Funding from

Adult and Community Learning
Early Learning
Special Education

And Permission from

The Connecticut Commission
on Children and the
Connecticut Department of
Education Bureau of Early
Childhood Education and
Social Services





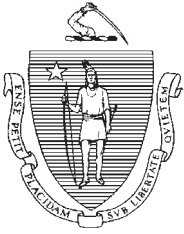
The
Massachusetts
Department
of Education

Every
Grownup

Is a Famous
Storyteller

The
Connecticut
Commission
On Children





The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Department of Education

350 Main Street, Malden, Massachusetts 02148
www.doe.mass.edu

Summer 2003

Dear Friends,

I am pleased to share "Every Grownup Is a Famous Storyteller," a booklet created by the Connecticut Commission on Children and adapted for Massachusetts families.



Special thanks is given to the Connecticut Commission on Children for allowing us to reproduce these simple but strong messages and engaging pictures. I would also like to thank the photographers (credits are on the back cover) for capturing the essence and importance of reading to young children. The Massachusetts Department of Education staff have added some helpful tips on how to raise a reader and how to make reading an integral part of a child's life.

Learning to read is the single most important factor in determining a child's later success in school and in life. Keep talking, reading, and listening to the children in your lives and enjoy yourselves in the process.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "David P. Driscoll".

David P. Driscoll
Commissioner of Education



Raise a Reader

You are your child's first and most important teacher! You have the power to help your child learn to read -- and love to read. Here are some easy but important things you can do at home, in a car, or at a supermarket. You can do these things to help your child get ready to read.

Here's How



Talk to your child as you wash clothes, cook, shop, and do other things. Explain what you are doing, or where you are going, and why. Read words and signs as you go.

Sing nursery rhymes or songs or listen to them on radio, cassette, or CD.

Tell your child stories from your childhood or about your family.

Clap or count out words as you speak or sing.

Ask questions that get your child to think and speak. Ask why, what, when, and which questions. Why do we have to water the plants? What would you rather eat in winter, hot soup or cold jello? When is it hotter, in summer or winter? Which is bigger, a puppy or a bumblebee?

Play matching games. Group laundry by color, shape, or size.

Play sorting games. Cut pictures from magazines and sort them into groups of animals, food, or toys.

Play rhyming games. Say words that rhyme like: boy and toy, or fox and box, or bake and cake.

Play with magnetic or cutout letters or the letters in alphabet cereal or soup. Talk about the sounds the letters make.

Show that you think reading is important. Visit the library or bookstore often. Give books as gifts. Read your favorite books over and over. Have a variety of reading materials in your home. Put them where your child can reach them.

Reading is an Important Part of Your Child's Life



Just a few minutes a day of reading aloud to children makes a great difference in their lives. It helps them get the information and skills they need to succeed in school. Reading aloud to children, especially those three through six years of age, helps them:

- ◆ understand the difference between written and spoken words
- ◆ learn the meaning of new words
- ◆ use more words in their own speaking
- ◆ learn to love books

Here are some ideas for reading aloud to your child.

Make reading time with your child fun for both of you. Find a quiet, comfortable place to read. Choose a children's book or poem that you both like. Remember that when you know and like a book, there is a better chance your child will like it.

Read to your child as often as you can and as much as you can. Fifteen minutes a day is a good start. The time you spend reading will help quiet your child down and make him or her feel secure and safe. Some reading times that may work for you and your child are:

- ◆ at the beginning or end of the day
- ◆ late in the morning after he or she has played or watched a TV program
- ◆ during snack time or before a nap

Choose books to help you teach. Use alphabet books to teach letters and sounds. Use counting books to teach counting and numbers. Use poetry or rhyming books to teach about the sounds of language. Use big books (oversized books used in schools and libraries) if you can. Let your child help you hold the book or turn the pages.

Talk about what you are reading. Ask questions like: "What part of the story did you like best?" or "Could what happened in the story really happen?"

Ask questions about the pictures. Ask questions like: "Can you find two things in the picture that are the same color (or size or shape)?" and "Can you find a picture that shows how people feel?" "Are they sad (or happy or afraid)?"

Read many kinds of books and be sure to "reread" favorite books. Read books that tell real and make believe stories. And don't forget that children love to hear their favorite books over and over and over again!

The Importance of Early Language

Language acquisition begins long before the first babbles or the first words. A baby's brain is preparing to speak before any speech sounds are uttered. As human beings, we communicate with all of our senses. We can begin a dialogue with a touch, a special look, a silly sound, or a sentence. The dialogue is continued with a rhythmic response:



mother smiles—baby smiles,
mother blows raspberries—baby smiles,
mother smiles and blows raspberries—baby puckers,
mother smiles—baby smiles,
mother smiles—baby looks away.

The dialogue ends when one partner turns away or there is no response. It is the simple back-and-forth of the early exchanges between the parent and baby that prepare the baby for the complexities of communicating with language.

A newborn's brain is pre-wired to pay attention to all language sounds. Over the first few months of life, an infant learns to pay particular attention to the special sounds of the family culture and language. Early pleasurable experiences, such as hearing the sounds of language, looking at a parent's smile, playing "peek-a-boo," lay pathways in the brain that facilitate later learning.

Recent research highlights the importance of early language stimulation for brain development and later learning. In the first three years of life, when the child makes the most dramatic gains in language development, the child's brain is producing most of the synapses, or pathways between brain cells. At birth, an infant has approximately 100 billion neurons, or brain cells. Each one can produce almost 15,000 synapses. Those synapses that are used repeatedly tend to become permanent. Those that are not activated tend to disappear.

Reading Readiness Begins Long Before Kindergarten

Just as with language, the rhythms and practice of reading books are learned long before a child can "sound-out" their first word. Children learn to sit in the parent's lap to listen to a story. They learn that if they point to pictures, their parents will name the pictures for them. They learn to turn the pages of a book.



Often a very young child will practice turning the pages of an upside-down book while babbling. This is the beginning of reading.

Often a child will insist on hearing the same story over and over and over even after he or she has committed the story to memory. In this way, the child is an active participant in anticipating the story as it unfolds from page to page. A child who is exposed to books, songs, rhymes and family stories is given a wonderful gift. That child's world of knowledge expands beyond the routines observed in the household and neighborhood. In the early years, these stories and images become part of the shared experiences in the family.

While the brain researchers expand our understanding of neural networks, we can all enrich the healthy development of the very young children in our lives. Listen and respond to start a dialogue—you can respond with a smile, a tickle, an imitation of a baby's babbles, a word, a hug, or an offer to read a book. The best news is the benefits of positive communication are not only for babies. You might find yourself smiling, laughing and enjoying yourself.

Alice S. Carter, Ph.D.
Yale University
Department of Psychology



Babies rejoice
in the sound
of your voice.



Dabble in babble.
Talk to babies.



Talk to babies.
Look how
they listen.



Stories aren't just
for bedtime.



Give your baby a strong
book beginning.
Read early and often.



Take time to talk
with a child.
It's more than
child's play.



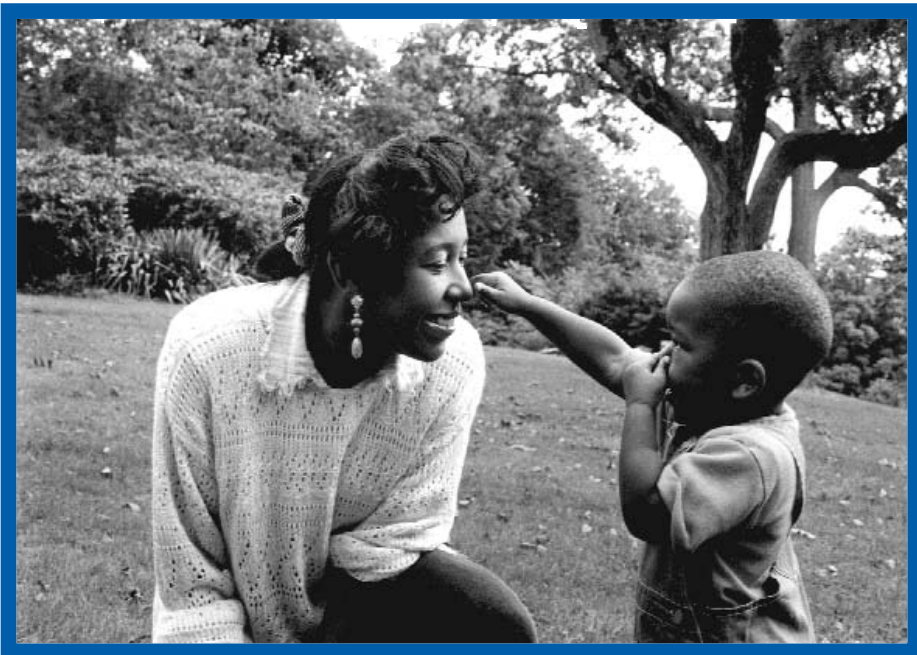
Talk with your child
wherever you go.
They hear
everywhere.



Children outgrow
everything but stories.



Every grownup
is a famous storyteller.



Stories are more
than child's play.



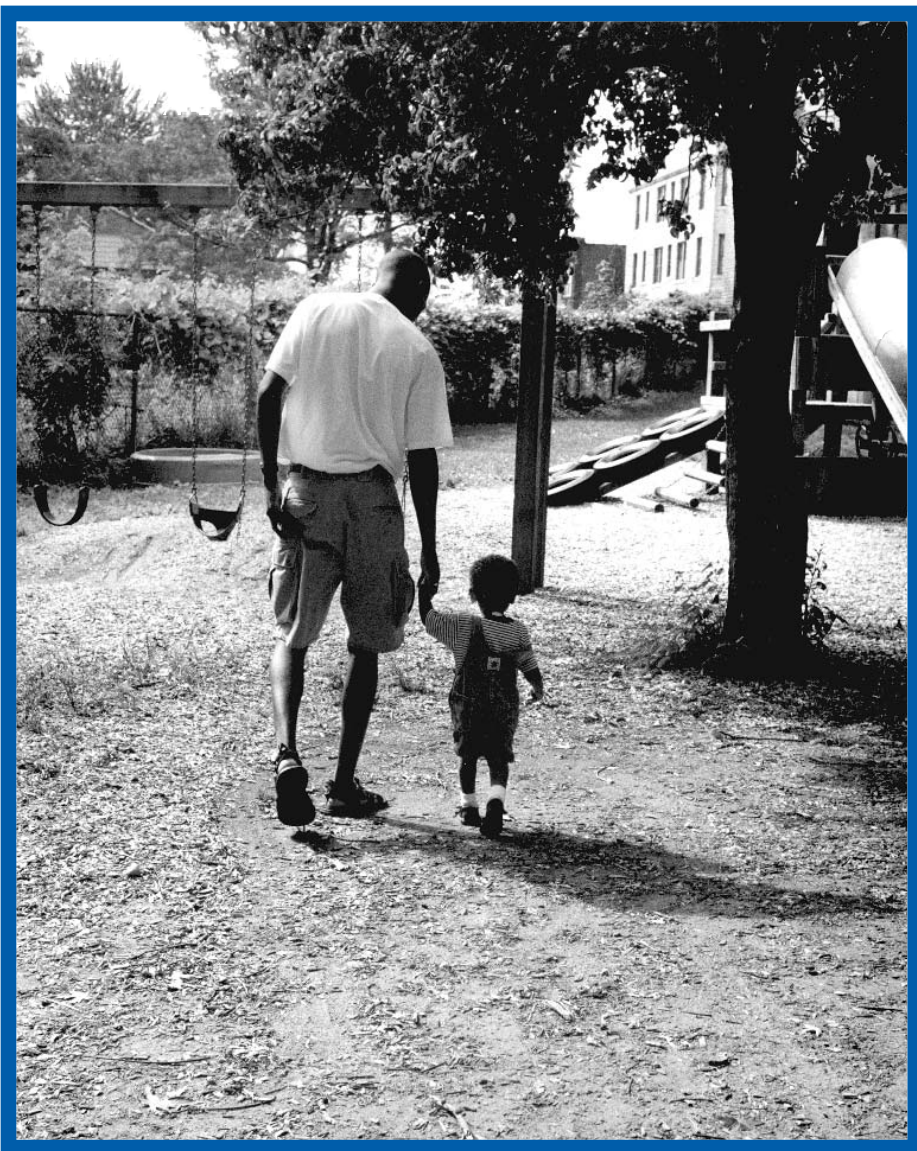
Words help them
get the picture.



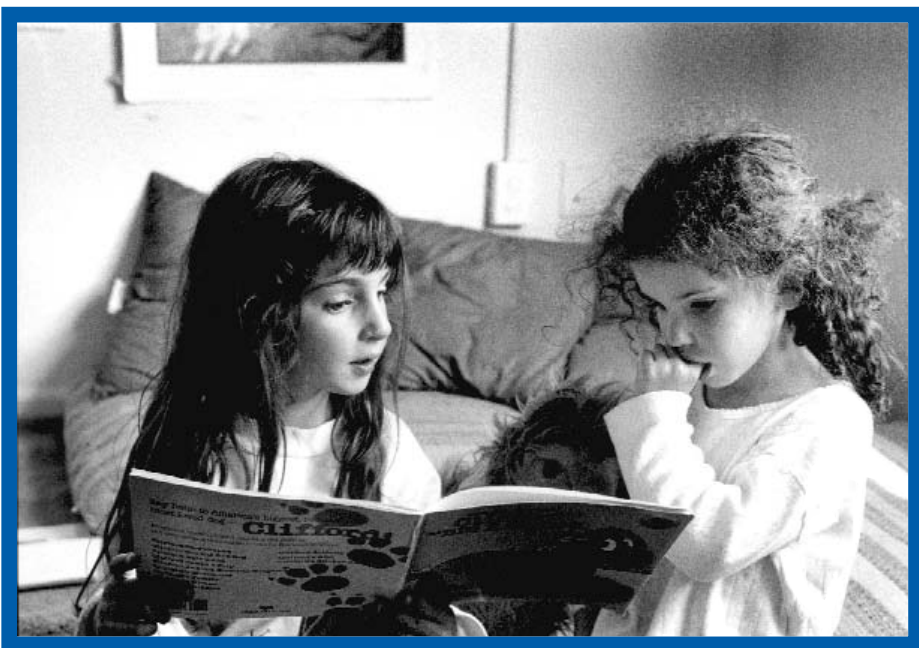
Every child has a story.
Every child has a song.



They laugh.
They sing.
They learn.
They grow.



Go on long talks together.



Children
who are read to
learn to read.



Tell all your friends
about this booklet.

To request copies contact:

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Helpful Websites

The Massachusetts Department of Education - www.doe.mass.edu
Adult and Community Learning Services - www.doe.mass.edu/acls/
Early Learning Services - www.doe.mass.edu/els/
Special Education - www.doe.mass.edu/sped/
Office of Reading - www.doe.mass.edu/read/
Massachusetts Family Literacy Consortium - www.doe.mass.edu/familylit/
The U.S. Department of Education - www.ed.gov
Reach Out and Read - www.reachoutandread.org
Get Ready to Read - www.getreadytoread.org



2003 The Massachusetts Department of Education

Special thanks to Linda Martin for the photograph on page 4;
Shelly Molnar for the photograph on page 1 (top left side);
Lynn Boston for the photographs on pages 1 (middle right), 2, 3 and 20.
Adapted for The Massachusetts Department of Education 2003 by Lynn Boston
and Kathy Rodriguez.



The Connecticut Commission on Children is grateful to those who helped create the Early Language and Literacy Campaign and the photo exhibit, "The Gift of Early Language," including:

Decker, America's Premier Micro Ad Agency, for crafting the slogans for the campaign;

Reach Out and Read, a pediatric early literacy program from the Boston Medical Center, for the slogan "Children who are read to learn to read."

The Junior League of Connecticut, for supporting literacy efforts in Connecticut;

Jane Gross, for photographs on pages 5, 6, 7, 10, 13, 14, 19, cover;

Frances B. Haviland, for photographs on pages 8, 11, 12, 15, 17, 18;

Beth Bye, and the children in the Trinity College Child Care Program;

Kate S. Haviland, for the photograph on page 9;

The Connecticut Children's Medical Center, for the photograph on page 16;

Alice S. Carter, for writing "The Importance of Early Language."

The full text version of this piece is available on the Connecticut Commission on Children internet site: www.cga.state.ct.us/coc/

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Editor: Patricia H. Estill
Design: Jones Design
Guilford, CT 06437