

Tips for Asking Open-Ended Questions

Open-ended questions improve critical thinking skills, engage the children in the story, and encourage children to predict feelings or events based on previous experiences.

- **Ask open-ended questions.** Instead of asking specific “what” questions, start asking more general open-ended questions that cannot be answered with a single word. For example, “What do you see on this page?” or “What’s happening here?”
- **Help your child when necessary.** When your child doesn’t know anything else to say about a picture, make a suggestion and try to get her to repeat it. For example, “The duck is swimming.” Now you say, “The duck is swimming...”
- **Ask your child to say more.** When your child gets used to answering open-ended questions, ask him to say something more by asking another question. For example, “What else do you see?”
- **Expand upon what your child says to build comprehension and vocabulary.** When your child says something about a picture, praise her and add a little to what’s been said. For example, if your child says, “Doggy bark”, you might say, “Yes. The doggy is barking at the kitty.” In this way, you fill in the little words and endings your child left out and provide a new piece of information. Later you might ask a question about this new information: “Who’s the doggy barking at in the picture?”
- **Keep your expansions short and simple.** Make sure you build upon your child’s phrases just a little so your child is able to imitate what you said.
- **Have your child repeat.** If you encourage your child to repeat your longer phrases, she will start using them more quickly.

Things to Remember

- During dialogic reading there are a lot of questions being asked. This means the book will take longer to read than one might anticipate.
- Open-ended questions take longer to answer than “what” questions. No matter which of the two types of questions you are asking, give your child time to construct a response (at least 4-7 seconds). Children need time to process your question, create a response in their minds, and present it to you out loud.
- Every children’s picture book has more going on than what the words depict. Take time to share the observations you make about the illustrations with your child. They may be ideas that your child has never considered before.
- If your child is not in the mood for dialogic reading, pay attention and choose a different time for talking about books in this way.

Dialogic Reading



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Dialogic Reading

Dialogic reading is a way to read a book that helps children develop storytelling skills, vocabulary and comprehension skills. With dialogic reading, the adult helps the child tell the story by asking questions. The adult becomes the questioner, the listener and the audience. Think of dialogic reading as a conversation with your child about the book you are sharing. Follow these steps to begin dialogic reading:

1. Read the book through the first time from start to finish.
2. Ask “what” questions. For example, “What color is the fish?” Reinforce your child’s answer by saying, “Yes, there is a blue fish and a red fish.” Ask these types of questions for a couple of weeks, or until you and your child feel comfortable with the interaction.
3. Next, keep questions open-ended. Read the same book with your child and ask questions they can’t answer with one word. For example, “Where do you think the fish are going?”
4. Try talking to your child this way when you are not reading a book. Your child will get used to you asking questions like this, which will make it easier when reading together and help them build comprehension skills.

The best books for dialogic reading have a simple story, are not too long, have pictures of things that are familiar to your child, show action and detail in pictures, and are interesting to your child. Dialogic reading is most effective when done with a book you and your child have read before.

By reading and having conversations, you can help children connect language and the content of books to their own language and experiences. Children practice using words they already know and they will also learn new words while you talk about the illustrations. You can expect more sharing from your child each time you engage in dialogic reading with the same book.

Research shows that children who are actively involved in the reading process have more advanced language and pre-reading skills. Children can jump several months ahead in learning after only a few weeks of dialogic reading.



Tips for Asking “What” Questions

Look through a book before you read it with your child for the first time. Define words your child may not know and talk about the illustrations together. Read the book from start to finish. Always read the title and author on the cover before reading the book aloud. After reading the book to your child at least once, start asking “what” questions.

- **Ask “what” questions.** Point to something in the pictures and say, “What’s this?” or “What’s this called?” Avoid questions that your child can answer with a “yes” or “no”, or by pointing.
- **Follow answers with questions.** When your child names an object, ask a question about it. For example: Your child names a truck in the picture. Ask, “What color is the truck?” or “What is this part of the truck called?”
- **Reinforce your child’s answers by repeating what she says.** For example, “Yes. That is a blue truck.”
- **Help your child as needed.** If your child isn’t able to answer your question, give the correct answer and ask her to repeat what you said.
- **Praise and encourage your child’s efforts.** Tell him when he is doing well by saying things like, “Good talking!” or “That’s right. Good job!”
- **Follow your child’s interests.** If your child shows an interest in a picture either by talking or pointing to it, follow it up immediately by asking questions to let your child talk.
- **Keep your reading times fun and like a game.** One way to do this is to switch between asking questions and just plain reading. You could have your child read one page and then have your child tell you about the next page. If your child is not in the mood for dialogic reading, pay attention and choose a different time for talking about books in this way.
- **Keep it short and simple.** Build on your child’s phrases just a little so your child will imitate what you say.
- **Ask “what” questions for a couple of weeks or until you and your child feel comfortable with the interaction. Next, start asking “open-ended” questions.**



Based on information from Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library, a program of the Public Library Association and the Association of Library Service to Children: ala.org/everychild