



AGA KHAN FOUNDATION

# Reading for Children facilitator's manual



AGA KHAN FOUNDATION - AN AGENCY OF THE AGA KHAN DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

COVER: READING FOR CHILDREN PROGRAMME IN NARYN OBLAST, KYRGYZSTAN. PHOTOGRAPHER: JEAN-LUC RAY

# **Reading for Children (RfC)**

## **facilitator's manual**

*Being read to from an early age is one of the strongest predictors of academic success...*

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## What is Reading for Children?

The **Reading for Children** programme responds to the fact that being read to as a child is one of the strongest predictors of later academic success. All over the world, too many children leave primary school unable to read and write fluently. What happens in school is important, but if we wait to tackle the problem until children are in school it is too late. Children who have been read to before they go to school, and whose family members continue to read to them, are shown to outperform those who have not had such opportunities. Reading at home also reinforces positive relationships within the family. Reading for pleasure helps to develop children's language, literacy, critical thinking, ability to communicate, social and emotional skills. Quite simply being read to from an early age helps children become confident learners.

A number of factors prevent parents/caregivers from being able to read to children. These include:

- Lack of easily available, affordable illustrated storybooks – especially in relevant local languages – in schools, homes and communities
- Family illiteracy and/or limited literacy skills
- Families underestimating the significance of their role in supporting children's language, learning and sense of self
- Heavy workloads and lack of time

The **Reading for Children** programme addresses these challenges by:

- Establishing mini-libraries – which can sometimes operate out of a tin trunk, wooden box or bag – and enabling parents/caregivers and siblings to borrow simple, illustrated storybooks to read to young children.
- Providing workshops for parents/caregivers/other family members which build their skills and confidence in interacting with their children, telling stories and making reading with their children an enjoyable experience.



The objectives of the **Reading for Children** programme are to:

- Provide access to books
- Ensure opportunities for young children to be introduced to storybooks and have enjoyable interactions with their families
- Strengthen parents'/caregivers' confidence in their abilities to support their children's development and learning
- Develop children's readiness for reading and school
- Reinforce emerging literacy skills in primary school students
- Sustain and develop literacy skills among adults with limited literacy skills/opportunities.

**Reading for Children** is simple, flexible and beneficial for the entire family. The programme was originally part of early childhood efforts. Very early on, the communities began to notice the benefits for older children and for themselves. The libraries are now widely used by older children and adults to reinforce their own literacy skills. Adults, particularly mothers and grandmothers, are demanding literacy classes. Older siblings are often seen reading with younger children, being read to by a parent/caregiver and reading alone. **Reading for Children** is transforming how family members interact with one another, developing a thirst for books and learning, and nurturing a culture of reading.

## Workshop Overview

This manual outlines an initial **workshop for parents/caregivers** who will be part of the **Reading for Children** programme. The full workshop consists of **five sessions** totalling approximately 10 hours. It is recommended that all five sessions be delivered. The workshop (all five sessions) enables parents/caregivers to:

- Understand the importance of their role in supporting their children's development through everyday interactions, telling stories and enjoying books with their children.
- Develop the knowledge, confidence and a repertoire of skills to support their children's development
- Nurture their children's enthusiasm and love of books and stories

For programmes which are already underway, sessions could be utilised individually in response to observed needs. For instance, this could be the case if low-literate parents/caregivers are timid about borrowing books or if there has been a decrease in oral storytelling.

*All parents/caregivers, regardless of educational background, economic status, or literacy level can benefit from this workshop.* Making creative use of everyday opportunities to support children's learning is something that all parents/caregivers can and should do. Oral traditions using the mother tongue, including storytelling, songs and poetry, are declining in too many places. Session 4, which is focused on books, will have different benefits for participants of different literacy levels. Illiterate or low literate parents/caregivers who haven't had the opportunity to go to school themselves will be equipped with the skills to enable their children to break these persistent cycles of illiteracy and poverty. Highly literate parents/caregivers, who sometimes drill their children to read very mechanically, will be motivated to put their children's enjoyment of books and stories first.

The five sessions could be delivered on consecutive days or spaced out over several weeks. Each session will require about two hours. Allow time for breaks. If there is extra time at the end of a session, consider reading a story (either the facilitator or a participant), singing a song, creating actions for a familiar children's song or inviting parents/caregivers to practice singing songs, telling rhymes or stories, or looking at books with children.



# Workshop Agenda

The objectives listed below detail what the parents/caregivers will achieve by the end of each session.

## **Session 1: Everyday Activities for Development**

- Feel confident that they play a vital role in supporting their children's development
- Recognise that all parents/caregivers face challenges in being able to find enjoyable time to spend with their children
- Understand how everyday activities can be used to support their children's development

## **Session 2: Supporting Language Development**

- Understand more about their children's language development
- Recognise how their actions contribute to their children's language development
- Be motivated to use songs, rhymes, stories and everyday conversations to support their children's language development

## **Session 3: Storytelling**

- Understand the importance of stories for the development of children's language and literacy
- Reinforce their confidence and skills in telling stories orally and using illustrations in books to tell stories (whether or not they can read)

## **Session 4: Why and How We Read to Children**

- Understand the importance and benefits of reading
- Increase skills and confidence to look at/read books with their children
- Know how to make reading an enjoyable experience for children of different ages

## **Session 5: Bringing It All Together**

- Feel confident that they can overcome the challenges they face when telling stories and reading with their children
- Feel confident applying the skills and knowledge learned during this workshop in their daily lives

# Information for Facilitators

## What do you do as a facilitator?

During the sessions, you will lead the discussions, encourage participants to draw on their own experiences and practices, listen to participants' views and challenges, model positive and enjoyable reading behaviours, provide opportunities for participants to practice reading and telling stories to young children, and provide feedback. The participants may be mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, or other community members. They may be literate, semi-literate, or illiterate. The diversity of the group will allow you to draw out unique and common experiences and reinforce that anyone can read and tell stories to young children.

## Before the workshop

- Read the Facilitator's Manual and the Sharing Stories Together booklet.
- Determine whether any activities will need modifications (e.g., materials unavailable, too difficult for expected participants, cultural adaptation).
- Gather and organise the materials required (or identify alternatives where materials are unavailable).
- Practice the demonstrations, role plays and other activities.
- Find out whether any participants will be bringing children, in which case identify where in the sessions children could also be involved (for example, parents/caregivers could practice reading to the children).
- Read the "Background Information for Facilitators" section of each session to become aware of the key information which should come across in each session.

## During the workshop

- Conduct the workshop in the language most familiar to the participants.
- Make sure the purpose of the workshop is well understood by the participants.
- Ensure participants understand the instructions for each activity.
- Give guidance and feedback as needed.
- Answer questions yourself or with the assistance of other participants.
- Help each participant identify how skills learned can be applied in their daily lives.
- At the end of each day, identify where improvements could be made for future workshops.



## After the workshop

- Consider when and how participants may receive ongoing support to share their experiences or elicit advice. Follow-up support in the form of meetings, workshops, or home visits will ensure the long-term benefits of this workshop.
- Discuss with the librarian how s/he might identify future topics for workshops and provide follow-up supports.

## Materials required for the workshop

It would be a good idea to gather all materials required for the sessions before the start of the workshop, so that you have them all on hand and can use them when appropriate.

- A bell or something loud enough to get people's attention
- Chart paper or a blackboard/whiteboard
- Markers or chalk
- Markers for group work
- 15 to 20 children's storybooks (include books for a variety of ages)
- Props (puppets, hats, objects, etc.) to enhance the storytelling experience (optional)
- Copies of "Sharing Stories Together" booklet – as many as you are able to provide. You may want to translate the booklet into the local language.

Print material (i.e., books, "Sharing Stories Together" booklet) should be in the local or national language where possible.





# Session 1: Everyday Activities for Development

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By the end of the sessions, parents/caregivers will:

- Feel confident that they play a vital role in their children's development
- Recognise that all parents/caregivers face challenges in being able to find enjoyable time to spend with their children
- Understand how everyday activities can be used to support their children's development through planned interactions and everyday activities

## Background information for facilitators

**Parents/caregivers have a huge role in helping children's learning. The way in which they talk and do everyday things with their children can help the latter grow up clever, capable, confident and caring.**

All parents/caregivers want their children to develop skills and abilities that will help them to succeed in life. They want their children to do well in school and contribute to their families and communities. While they are very aware of the importance of their role in keeping their children safe, healthy and fed, sometimes they underestimate their importance in helping their children to learn. They don't realise how important their role is in supporting their children's learning, language and sense of self.

Parents/caregivers may ask how they could find time for such things when they are so busy. But in fact many of the basic concepts which are important for children to learn are best learnt through everyday activities. It is not necessary to put aside time to "teach" children. A lot can be achieved by simply talking more with and listening to children while involved in everyday activities such as working in the fields, preparing food, bathing, eating meals, tidying up and getting the child ready to sleep.

## Activity 1 - Getting to know one another

Welcome participants to the workshop by giving them a broad overview of what you will be discussing and doing together over the course of these sessions.

### **Sample introduction:**

*“In these sessions we will be talking about how we can support children’s overall language learning and sense of themselves. We will start by talking about using everyday activities to help children grow up confident and intelligent. In later sessions we will be looking at telling stories and rhymes, singing songs and looking at books as examples of important activities you can do with your children. We are all here to learn together. I hope you will all feel comfortable in joining in and sharing your thoughts and ideas.”*

Play a short game to help people get to know each other. Here is an example: When you ring the bell, each person must introduce him or herself to one other individual and share one positive memory of their childhood. Each pair will only have 20-30 seconds to do this. When you ring the bell again participants will find someone else to meet. This process will continue until each participant has had a chance to talk to everyone in the group (or almost everyone). There is no need to write anything down but ask them to try to remember who they meet.

At the end of the game bring everyone back together and ask each person to introduce someone to the group and share what they learnt about that person’s childhood memory. Each person should introduce a new person to the group.



## Activity 2 - Sara's story

### Sample introduction:

*“Today we are going to explore how we can make good use of everyday activities and opportunities to support children’s development and learning. We are going to look at two different sorts of activities:*

- The everyday things you would do with your young children like helping them to wash and dress, eat meals and putting them to sleep.
- Your daily chores when children may be close by you – things like preparing food, cleaning the house, working in the kitchen, garden or fields.

*We are going to start with a story.”*

### Read Story 1 to the group:

Sara (choose a name more suitable) is very tired. She has been working in the field all day, chopping fire wood and planting maize. Last night she didn't sleep well because her baby, Jay, is suffering from diarrhoea and was very fussy whenever he tried to breastfeed. Now it is time to prepare the meal and there is no one to help her. Jay is asleep in bed and two-year-old Alam is outside hitting a stick on the wall and feeling bored. Sara fetches some green beans and Alam calls out, “I'm hungry. I want something to eat.” “Be quiet!” says Sara. “I'm working now.” She fills a basin with water and begins to wash the beans. Alam comes inside and puts his hand in the basin. Sara slaps his hand and says, “Go away! Your hand is dirty.” Alam runs to the corner and starts to cry. Sara pays no attention to him so he cries louder. The noise wakes Jay up, and he also starts to cry. Sara wonders how she will ever get the meal prepared. Her head aches with all the noise, and she shouts at Alam, “Be quiet, or the tiger will come and get you.”

### Ask the participants the following questions:

- What happened in the story?
- How did Sara feel?
- How did Alam feel?
- Have you ever felt the way that Sara did? What did you do when you felt like this?
- What could Sara have done differently?

See what ideas the participants come up with. Then explain that you are going to tell a second story where Sara handles the situation differently – and does some of the things that they have mentioned.

## Activity 2 (continued)

### Read Story 2 to the group:

Sara is very tired. She has been working all day, chopping fire wood and planting maize. Last night she didn't sleep well because her baby, Jay, is suffering from diarrhoea and was very fussy whenever she tried to breastfeed him. Now it is time to prepare the meal and there is no one to help her. Jay is asleep in the bed and two-year-old Alam is outside hitting a stick on the wall, feeling bored. Sara fetches some green beans and Alam calls out, "I'm hungry. I want something to eat." "Come inside," Sara calls. "I know you're hungry. Let's try to hurry up and make some dinner." Alam comes into the house banging his stick. "Let's try to be quiet so your brother doesn't wake up," she says. "That way you and I can get the food ready more quickly. I really need your help because I'm so tired. Maybe you could help me wash these green beans? Put your stick down and go fetch the basin over there." Alam runs and brings the basin and Sara pours the water into it. "Oh, your hands are dirty from playing outside," she says. "What should we do?" "Wash hands!" says Alam. Sara pours water over his hands. "Rub them together," she says. He rubs his hands together, laughing, and says, "Now beans." "Yes, now beans," says Sara. Let's see if you can wash them just as clean as your hands. While you do that I'll get the wood for a fire." Alam likes washing the beans. The water feels nice and cool and he likes the way the beans swish around his hands, like green fish. "Look, the beans are almost clean," says Alam. "Here. Move them in to this other basin of water," says his mother. He picks them up one handful at a time, and moves them to the other basin. He notices that the bottom of the first basin is covered with the dirt from the beans. "Ma, look!" he says. "Yes," says his mother, "look at all the dirt that you washed off the beans. Now wash them once more in the clean water. See if that water has any dirt in it. I think they're so clean that they'll be ready to cut up and cook. Soon we can have dinner."

### Ask the participants the following questions:

- What was different this time?
- Do you think it took more time for Sara? Why/why not?
- How did Alam feel? How did Sara feel?
- How did she involve him in what she was doing? What new things did he learn?
- How did she help him to communicate, think of others and be helpful?



## Activity 3 - Spending time with your children

### **Participants should get into small groups.**

Ask each group to discuss a specific everyday activity that they either do directly with their children or as their children accompany them nearby (bathing them, cooking, washing, etc.).

Ask them to discuss the following:

- What goes on at this time?
- What are their young children doing during this time?
- How do they involve them?
- What do they talk about and how?
- What are their children learning?
- What more could they do to support their children's learning?

### **After the small group discussions are over, participants can share some of the points with the whole group.**

Summarise the different points made by them. Point out that sometimes it is easy for parents/caregivers to get angry with them like Sara did especially when the days are long and tiring. Mention that you have been in this situation sometimes (give an example from your own experience). Explain that children love spending time with their parents/caregivers and learn a lot from them. Remind participants of the importance of taking the time to respond to their needs and interests. The more we involve children in our everyday activities and take an interest in their ideas the more children will learn. Listening to your children and responding in a non-threatening manner strengthens the bond between you and your children. Taking an interest in their ideas and opinions are all very important. This natural interaction develops basic language skills and builds confidence in the child.

Conclude this activity by giving participants feedback about their knowledge and practices. Point out all the positive things that they do, including those brought up by participants.

**Sample conclusion:**

*“You’ve described many different ways in which some of you already use everyday activities to support your children’s development – even though you nearly all said that you hadn’t thought about this as something that helps their development. You’ve mentioned things like:*

- *Naming body parts as you wash your children, asking, for example, ‘Where’s your nose?’*
- *Talking with and singing to babies as you massage them*
- *Getting your children to help with washing dishes and sort out the different utensils and plates, pans in one place, plates in another, spoons in another.*
- *Asking them to help with things like washing vegetables, picking stones out of the lentils, scooping out cups of rice from the store and putting it into a bowl for washing and talking with them about what you are doing*
- *Talking with them and answering their questions when they help feed the animals*
- *Letting them sit and dig in the earth on the edge of the field while you work, calling to them and going to see what they are doing every so often*

*These things all help children’s language development and learning. Simply talking to them, taking an interest in what they tell you and answering their questions are very important. It helps them learn and it also makes them feel valued and cared for.”*

## **Activity 4 - Discuss concerns or problems**

Ask participants if they have any concerns or if these ideas will be difficult to put into practice. Ask them to identify solutions for the problems they have raised. If they have difficulty doing this, here is an example you might share:

*“A number of you mentioned that young children aren’t really able to help – so it just takes more time and effort to include them in daily chores like food preparation or feeding the animals. It’s quicker to do it yourself. But, in fact, spending a little bit of time getting your young child settled into an activity, like washing a few beans while you begin with other food preparations, can also save you time as your child is happily occupied instead of either running off or bothering you because s/he wants attention. Do you remember that’s what happened in the story about Sara? And of course this also helps children learn important practical life skills – so it is time well spent. Usually it is not necessary to ‘teach’ young children but rather to offer opportunities for them to discover and learn through their own activity. Remember: Young children learn by doing. The key is always communication – talking with and listening to children and supporting their efforts.”*

Ask each participant to share one practical idea that they will try with their child at home. Write this on the chart paper/blackboard. Ensure that a copy is kept for later sessions.



## Session 2: Supporting Language Development

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By the end of the session participants will:

- Understand more about their children's language development
- Recognise how their actions contribute to their children's language development
- Be motivated to use songs, rhymes, stories and everyday conversations to support their children's language development

### Background information for facilitators

**The more language young children hear and the more they are encouraged to use it, the better their language and literacy skills will be. Children learn by talking with others.**

Parents/caregivers play a vital role in encouraging children's language development. Even before children can talk they are learning language. Hearing lots of language at this stage is crucial in ensuring good language development. Children who do not hear lots of language from early on suffer from language delays and struggle at school. From birth their understanding of what people say grows at a rapid pace and most children begin to use words by around the age of two. Between two and three most children's speech develops very fast. Children are learning new words all the time and putting them together. They learn a lot just by listening to others (whether it is talking, singing, hearing stories, etc.). They will learn even faster if people talk to them about what they are doing, encourage their attempts to say words, sing songs, etc. This does not have to be a special activity. It can happen while other things are going on, for example, while children are being washed, while they are watching their mothers prepare food or while they are feeding the chickens. Children develop at different speeds. Some learn to talk quickly, imitating everything that other people say, while others just listen. Simply taking an interest in what children are doing and saying and praising them for their efforts makes children feel confident, proud of their achievements and encourages them to learn more.

**Sample introduction to session:**

*“In the last session we talked about how we can make good use of everyday activities as opportunities to support children’s learning. (If this session is on a different day, ask participants if they tried any of the ideas at home.) This session will look at how you can support your children’s language development.”*





## Activity 1 - Current literacy practices in the home

**Ask the participants how many of them tell stories, rhymes, sing to and read with their children.** This will help you to find out more about their current practices. Explain to the participants that you want to ask them about the stories, rhymes, and so forth that they use at home so they can see what they are already doing and learn from one another.

### Use these questions as a guide:

- Do you or other family members tell stories to your children? What sort of stories do your children like?
- Do you or other family members sing songs or recite rhymes to your children? What sort of songs and rhymes do your children like?
- Do you or other family members play with your children? What sort of games do you play? What do you think they learn from them?
- Is there anything else that you or another family member does to support children's language development?

Conclude the activity by summarising the examples provided by the participants and reinforce positive practices. Use examples that have been shared by participants.

### Sample conclusion:

*“Very few of you have books in your houses – except for your older children's school books. However quite a number of you have pictures of people or scenes from magazines on the walls. You say your children love looking at these and naming them and that they also like looking at some of the pictures in the school books. You also often sing songs and tell stories to your young children which is a great gift that we can all give our children.”*

## Activity 2 - Challenges to supporting children's language development

### Ask participants to pair up:

Ask them to talk about a time in their lives when they had to face a challenge. It can be about anything. How did they overcome this challenge?

After they have had time to discuss for a few minutes...

### Bring everyone back together:

Tell them that they are now going to discuss the challenges they experience when telling stories, poems and rhymes, or when reading to them so that you can try and address them. Encourage them to be open and honest so that appropriate solutions can be found and so that they can learn from each other. Make a list on chart paper/blackboard and keep this information as you will need it for the final session.

### Now divide participants into groups of 4-5:

Ask them to discuss solutions to one or two of the challenges that they have talked about in the larger group. One member from each group can present the ideas.

Ask participants to tell a story or sing a song with their children at home. Tell them you will talk about it at the next session. Conclude the session by asking a volunteer to tell a story or lead a song or rhyme.

### Participants will probably share ideas such as:

- they cannot read
- they have no time
- they cannot access books

Some of these challenges will be addressed during the sessions. At the end of the workshop, there will be an activity to find out whether or not parents/caregivers feel that they will be able to overcome the challenges based on ideas discussed during the workshop.



## Session 3: Storytelling

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By the end of the session participants will:

- Understand the importance of stories for the development of children's language and literacy
- Reinforce their confidence and skills in telling stories orally and using illustrations in books to tell stories (whether or not they can read)

### Background information for facilitators

**Giving children the opportunity to listen to stories being told from memory and the opportunity to look at pictures and books are important ways for parents/caregivers and other family members to help children grow up clever and ready to make the most of learning opportunities. Even very young children are able to listen to and appreciate being told stories.**

Many parents/caregivers tell their children stories and this is a very good tradition – although it is important that stories for very young children are not frightening. Young children like stories that are about things they are familiar with. They like stories about themselves more than anything. They also like stories about animals, their village, their families and the everyday things they do.

It is possible to develop interesting and engaging stories using pictures. Parents/caregivers and children of any age can create and tell stories.

## Activity 1 - Feedback from last session and follow-up

Ask participants to share examples of what they have been doing with their children to support their language development since the last session.

## Activity 2 - The importance of telling stories

### Sample introduction:

*“In the prior session we talked about how we can support children’s language development generally. In this section, we are going to talk specifically about storytelling.”*

### Telling stories is important because:

- Children love listening to stories
- Stories help develop language skills
- Children are exposed to new words and ideas
- Children get to make predictions and ask questions
- Stories develop listening and concentration skills
- They strengthen family bonds
- Through stories parents/caregivers contribute to their children’s development, whether or not they can read

Ask participants why they think telling stories is important. Brainstorm with them about what makes a story interesting and exciting. Refer to page 31 on how to make stories interesting.

Make sure the following points are covered:

- Children love listening to stories
- Stories help develop language skills
- Children are exposed to new words and ideas
- Children get to make predictions and ask questions
- Stories develop listening and concentration skills
- They strengthen family bonds
- Through stories parents/caregivers contribute to their children’s development, whether or not they can read



## Activity 3 - Telling a story orally

**Think of a story that you can share beforehand and practice telling it before the workshop.**

When telling a story, it is important to keep in mind the following points:

- It should be interesting and engaging for those who hear it.
- As you are telling the story, use different gestures, tones and facial expressions and make eye contact with the children. Incorporate everyday objects, pots, etc. into the story where appropriate.
- Ask questions along the way and give time for the children to respond. Allow them to make predictions and state their opinions.
- Once the story has ended, ask the children questions about the story.

**Gather the participants (and children).** If there are children use them in this activity. If not, then you can invite the participants to role-play the children. There are two ways in which you might want to do this. Children can either sit in the circle with you sitting in between them or they can cluster around you. Explain to participants that at home they would sit with their children next to them. They will get to see how this is done in a later activity. For now, the purpose is to focus on how to tell an engaging story.

**Tell an engaging story** and then ask participants what they thought you did to make the story interesting and engaging. Make sure that they have covered the key points above.

**Ask a participant or child to re-tell the story in his or her own words.** While the story is being retold, you can help by asking open-ended questions when they cannot remember what happens next.

Explain to participants that **retelling stories** is one way to improve children's understanding of stories and their sequence. The goal should be to encourage children to think critically about the story and to improve their understanding and vocabulary by having them articulate their thoughts. As they become more comfortable with retelling stories, their language and listening skills will improve.

## Activity 4 - Using book illustrations to tell stories

Explain to participants that the previous activity focused on telling stories orally. This activity will show participants how they can use the illustrations in a book in order to tell their own story.

### **Choose a book (the title and words should be covered with paper):**

Sit down on the floor and ask children or participants to sit near you so that everyone can see the pictures. As you are telling the story, use different gestures, facial expressions and tones for characters. Point to the pictures as you are describing what is happening. Ask questions as you are reading. Give them opportunities to ask questions. Allow them to make predictions on what will happen next.

If this is a large group, you will need to hold the book up for them (pictures facing the group). Let them know that this is not the best way of reading to their children at home, but you are using this technique so that they can all see the pictures.

### **Once you have told the story, ask participants for feedback:**

- How did you use the illustrations in the book to tell the story?
- Do you think this is a good idea? Why or why not?
- How would you tell a story based on pictures?
- How could this be a fun activity for you and your children?

### **Divide participants into groups of 4-5:**

Ask each group to choose a book (the title and words should be covered with paper). Give them the opportunity to look through the book together. Explain to participants that in their groups, they will be telling a story based on the illustrations. Ask them to take turns telling the story based on the illustrations in the book.

After they have had time to discuss for a few minutes...

### **Bring everyone back together and ask the following questions:**

- What did you think about this activity?
- Is this something that you as a parent/caregiver could do with your children?
- How could you help your children tell stories using the illustrations in a book?



Remind participants that **telling stories, rhymes** and **singing songs** all contribute to children's development. The story can be based on the illustrations in a book, magazines or photos. It can sometimes be easier to tell a story rather than read a book for example, while on a bus, in a field, walking together or washing dishes.

Each participant can take a book home to practice telling stories using the illustrations in the book. The words in the book do not have to be covered; this was done in order to emphasise telling a story using pictures and practicing this skill.

**Optional parent-child activity:**

Ask participants who came with their children to choose a book and practice telling the story based on the pictures. They should look through the book once before telling the story to their children, and then use different **facial expressions, tones** and **gestures** when telling the story. Tell the participants that the process will be more interesting for everyone if the children get to ask questions and add their own ideas throughout the story. To encourage this, participants can stop so that their children can ask questions. They can also ask questions to their children and point to the pictures as they tell the story. Do not focus so much on "the how" but let the participants get comfortable with using a book and the illustrations to tell the story to their children.

Walk around the room and observe. Make note of the good things that you see and anything that you think you have to address to the group once the activity is done. Ask participants for feedback and find out if the children enjoyed the process.

**This approach can be used for children of all ages.**

It is important that the participants know that even very young children are able to listen to and enjoy stories. You will talk more about this in another session. But it is important to mention this throughout the sessions. The purpose of these questions is to get the participants to believe that this is doable and an alternative for "reading" to children. If any participants feel that they cannot do this, find out why and try to address the issue.





## Session 4:

# Why and How We Read to Children

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By the end of this session participants will:

- Understand the importance and benefits of reading
- Increase skills and confidence to look at/read books with their children
- Know how to make reading an enjoyable experience for children of different ages

### Background information for facilitators

**Being read to from an early age is one of the strongest predictors of school or academic success. This session is best suited when the majority of the participants have basic literacy skills.**

All over the world, too many children leave primary school unable to read and write fluently. Children with poor reading skills obtain poor grades in school. This leads to a lack of self-confidence, greater likelihood of behaviour problems, and lack of interest in school. As a result, most will likely drop out early and do not fulfil their potential. What happens in school is important, but if we wait until children are in school to tackle the problem, it is too late. Parents/caregivers can help ensure children's success in school by providing enjoyable language and literacy experiences in the home. Research from around the world tells us that when children have the chance to look at books when they are very young and when people read to them this makes it easy for them to learn to read when they go to school. These early experiences with books before children enter primary school are a predictor of school success.

## Background information for facilitators (continued)

### Reading to children of any age is important because they:

- love listening to stories
- develop a love of books and learning from an early age
- learn new ideas and words
- strengthen language and concentration skills
- develop imagination and creativity
- are better prepared for school and learning to read and write
- reinforce literacy skills being developed at school
- develop stronger bonds with family members who read to them

Before school age, parents/caregivers should not make their children read the words. They should look and talk about the pictures together, tell and retell the story, and ask questions about the story. It is important to continue reading to children even after they are reading on their own. These are called emergent readers. The same book can be used over and over again, in different ways, as the child grows older. For example, a parent/caregiver might focus on the pictures when the child is really young, on individual words when the child is a little older, and encourage the child to read the story once s/he is reading independently.

It's never too early to look at books or read to a child. Sometimes the parent/caregiver takes the lead, sometimes the child. For example, the parent/caregiver might be talking about a picture and the child starts to tell the story. The parent/caregiver should pause to hear what the child is saying and encourage the child to continue sharing his/her ideas. As children begin to read words, the parent/caregiver and child can take turns reading. The parent/caregiver can help the child with difficult words by encouraging the child to sound out the word or get clues from the pictures. Children enjoy looking at/reading books with parents/caregivers. Sometimes it is just as valuable for them to look at a book with a sibling or a friend, and even on their own.

**Sample introduction to session:**

*“In the last session, we talked about the importance of telling stories orally to children and using pictures to tell stories. (If this session is on a different day, ask participants if they tried telling a story at home using pictures. Elicit some examples.) In this session, we will turn our attention to reading books with children.”*

## Activity I - Why should we read to children?

If there are participants in the group who can read, ask them to share with the group how they learned to read. Who read to them? Was it a family member? A teacher? Someone else? What do they remember about these experiences? In what ways do they think these experiences helped them in school and later life?

**Divide the participants into groups of 4-5:**

Tell the groups that you would like to hear their ideas on why they think it is important to read to children. Ask the participants to share their ideas with the whole group. Write/draw these ideas on a chart paper/blackboard for all to see. Acknowledge the ideas given and add any additional points not raised.

Make sure the following points are covered.

**Reading to children of any age is important because they:**

- love listening to stories
- develop a love of books and learning from an early age
- learn new ideas and words
- strengthen language and concentration skills
- develop imagination and creativity
- are better prepared for school and learning to read and write
- reinforce literacy skills being developed at school
- develop stronger bonds with family members who read to them

## Activity 2 - How do we read with children?

Choose a book to read with the group. You will read this book to the group in the most boring, unengaging way possible. Tell the participants you would like to read them a story. Do not tell them anything about the story or how you will read it.

How do you make a story/reading experience boring?

- Hold the book such that only you can see the pictures
- Begin the story without any introduction
- Read in a monotone voice – do not use any expression in your voice
- Only look at the book, not the participants.
- Do not use any facial or hand gestures
- Read the story from beginning to end without any pauses

After you have read the story, ask the participants: “Did you enjoy the story?” Most likely the participants will shout an emphatic “No!” Elicit from the participants all of the reasons they did not like the story/reading experience.

Challenge the participants to do it better.

### **Divide the participants into pairs:**

Ensure each pair has a book. The individuals can take turns being the “parent/caregiver” and the “child”. Ask the parent/caregiver to read to the child in an engaging and interesting way with the aim of having an enjoyable reading experience. Give the participants time to practice taking turns being the parent/caregiver and child.

After each reading, ask the “child” to tell the parent/caregiver what they liked or did not like about how the story was read.

### **Bring the participants back together:**

Ask them to share the strategies that they used to make the story more engaging and enjoyable. If it would be helpful, write these strategies on a chart paper/blackboard.



Possible strategies might include:

- Being enthusiastic about the story you will read together
- Talking about the story before reading the story
- Looking at the pictures before reading the story
- Encouraging the child to touch the book and turn the pages
- Changing their voices for different characters in the story
- Speaking clearly and at a good pace
- Using hand gestures or facial expressions and making eye contact every so often
- Sitting close together so that both can see the story
- Pausing every so often to talk about the story or the pictures, ask questions, or make predictions about what will happen next
- Pointing to a word or picture as it was said
- Listening to the child when s/he make attempts to point out something, ask a question, share an idea, tell a story, etc. Extending these attempts through questioning
- Praising (rather than scolding) the child at every opportunity (e.g., child correctly identifies a familiar object in a picture, finds a word s/he knows on the page, child attempts to read a word, etc.)
- Letting children (who can) read some or all of the story to the parent/caregiver, encouraging the child's attempts to read and helping the child to sound out the words or get clues from the pictures when s/he has difficulty reading a word

Tell the participants you will read another story, this time using as many of the strategies they've identified as possible. After you have read the story, ask participants: Did you enjoy the story? Likely the answer will be an emphatic "Yes!". Elicit examples of the strategies applied.

## Activity 3 - After the story ends

Ask the participants what they could do after the story ends to extend children's learning.

Participants might suggest ideas such as:

- Read the story again
- Role play the story
- Talk about the story
- Ask questions about the story

Acknowledge all of these ideas.

Tell the participants you would like to discuss further what kinds of questions they could ask about the story. What might you ask a two-year old? A six-year old? And so on. Help them see that very young children will respond to very simple questions about the pictures and events in the story, especially the characters in the story. They could ask children to name different pictures or show you the different characters (e.g., What is this? Show me the boy).

As children get older, parents/caregivers can ask children questions about the story (e.g., who did what, what happened, etc.) but also ask their opinions of the story (Did you like it? What was your favourite part? Did you like the ending? How did the character feel when...?).

## Activity 4 – Choosing books our children will like

Ask the participants to browse through the books. Ask each parent/caregiver to choose one book they think their child will like. Ask them to share with the group why they chose the book and why they think their child will like it.



## Session 5: Bringing it All Together

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By the end of this session, participants will:

- Feel confident that they can overcome the challenges they face when telling stories and reading with their children
- Feel confident applying the skills and knowledge learned during this workshop in their daily lives



## Background information for facilitators

**There are numerous ways to support children's language development, including:**

- Everyday conversations
- Asking questions
- Taking an interest in the child's ideas and questions
- Songs
- Rhymes
- Telling stories
- Talking about pictures
- Reading books

All of these activities provide opportunities for children to interact with caregivers. The more enjoyable the interactions, the more children and caregivers will want to repeat them. The more they are repeated, the better the family relationships and the more children will learn.

Children are learning all the time. They learn more from the family than anyone else... especially before they start school. Helping children develop their language skills and be familiar with books will help them do better in school.

### **Remember:**

- Children's language development can be supported informally (e.g., through everyday activities) and through more formal interactions (e.g., looking at a book together).
- Children's language development is best supported when they hear and see language being used in multiple ways.
- With help from family members, children can develop a love of books from an early age.
- Being read to should be easy and fun. It doesn't matter if they can't read the words themselves. It's all about the story.
- All parents/caregivers, regardless of education level or economic status, can help their children to learn.

**Sample introduction to session:**

*“We have discussed many different ways we can support our children’s language development ranging from the everyday moments in our daily life to telling stories and looking at books with our children. In this session we bring together what we have learned and make sure any of your questions or concerns are addressed. It is important that by the end of this session you feel ready to try what you have learned here with your own children.”*

## Activity 1 – What did we learn?

Ask the participants to tell you what they remember learning in this workshop. Ensure that each participant has an opportunity to share something he or she has learned (a fact or a skill). If any key messages from the previous sessions have not been mentioned raise them now.

**Make sure the following language activities are covered:**

- Everyday conversations
- Asking questions
- Taking an interest in the child’s ideas and questions
- Songs
- Rhymes
- Telling stories
- Talking about pictures
- Reading books

## Activity 2 – Questions, challenges and solutions

Remind participants that in the earlier sessions they shared some of their challenges and concerns when you were talking about using everyday activities to support children's language development. Ask the participants to share with you now any questions, concerns or challenges they have about anything they have heard or learned in this workshop. Write/draw these challenges on a chart paper/blackboard.

### **Divide participants into groups of 4-5:**

Ask each group to choose one or two challenges and discuss how they might overcome these challenges.

After they have had time to discuss...

### **Bring the group back together and hear the ideas:**

Encourage other participants to share other possible solutions to the same challenges. Refer to the FAQs section for suggestions on how to respond to participants' most common questions and concerns.



## Activity 3 – Sharing stories together

Distribute copies of the **Sharing Stories Together** booklet to the participants. Give the participants a few minutes to look through the book and talk about it with their neighbours. With the whole group, ask participants to identify the different positive practices they see in the pictures. Are they able to identify something that they learned during this workshop?

Go through the book with them page by page. For each page read the text and ask questions about the pictures.

Here are some examples:

- On page 2, ask the participants what they notice about the ages of the children (children of different ages are being read to – children can be read to from an early age).
- On page 4, ask the participants what they notice about the expressions on the faces (both the adult and the child are smiling in both of the pictures – they are having fun!).
- On page 10, remind participants of the importance of telling stories (not just reading stories).
- On pages 14 and 15, ask the participants who they see reading to the children (notice that children enjoy being read to by parents/caregivers, aunts, uncles, grandparents and siblings. Point out that when older siblings read to younger siblings it reinforces their own literacy skills helping them do better in school).
- On pages 16 and 17, ask the participants what they see happening – who is involved, how are they sitting? (A range of family members are engaged in the reading experience, everyone is sitting very closely together.)

## Activity 4 – Action plan

Ask each participant to identify two or three learnings from this workshop that they will apply at home with their children. To help the participants ask guiding questions such as:

- How might you use everyday moments to support your child's language development?
- What are some songs or rhymes you think your children will like?
- Will you be borrowing books from the mini-library?

## Final Remarks

Thank the participants for their contributions to the workshop. Wish them success with taking their action plan forward. If you will be seeing them again on a regular basis let them know you would be available to provide advice, answer questions, etc. **Conclude with a familiar song or read a story together.**



## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What kind of books do children like?**

Very young children (under age 4) like books that have lots of pictures, large text and very few words or sentences on each page – simple and short stories are preferred especially when the story is about something they are familiar with (e.g., children of their own age, daily life events, celebrations and festivals, family life, etc.).

As children get older (5 and older), they like slightly longer books with more text and more complex storylines, more adventure and humour. They enjoy make-believe characters and animals (e.g., fairytales, folktales) and finding the lesson or moral of the story. The older the child gets the longer and more complex the story can be.

### **What if we've read all the books?**

At any age, children like reading the same story over and over again. Books can be read in many ways and at different ages. You might look at the pictures one time, the words another time, or role play the story another time.

### **What language should I use with my child?**

Parents/caregivers may be worried because the school that their child will go to uses a language different from their own. Reassure them that the best thing they can do is use their own language with their child. Wherever possible the books that the child sees first should be in their own language. If there aren't any books though, they should not worry. They should use the books they have and maximise opportunities to talk to their child in their home language. Research shows that children who develop basic literacy skills in their home language first learn the language of the school more easily.

### **How are we going to replace the books if they get spoiled?**

It's up to you how you think about this. In some places, parents/caregivers contribute a little money to ensure book repairs or replacements.

### **When should I start talking to my child?**

Research shows children respond to language even before they are born. They know their mothers' voice and like to hear the sound of her voice even while they are still in the womb. The more you talk to your baby and young child the better their language skills will be. Children who hear lots of language from an early age have bigger vocabularies, are more expressive, and do better in school.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **When should I start reading to my child?**

It's never too early to start reading to your child. With young babies you might want to spend more time telling them stories and singing them songs and just talking with them. Well before children are two they really love to have books read to them especially when they can just cuddle next to you and enjoy your company.

### **Why should I let my child choose the books?**

Sometimes children are more motivated to look at the books they have chosen. If you let them choose, even sometimes, you will get a better sense of the kinds of books they like. They might even bring you back one of their favourites to read yet again!



**The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN)** is a group of development agencies with mandates that include the environment, health, education, architecture, culture, microfinance, rural development, disaster reduction, the promotion of private-sector enterprise and the revitalisation of historic cities. AKDN agencies conduct their programmes without regard to faith, origin or gender and have decades of experience in integrating economic, social and cultural development.

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For more information, please visit our website: [www.akdn.org](http://www.akdn.org)

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