



Let's Talk

Learning to Tell Stories

“ My third-grader, Damien, is having some trouble expressing himself. When I help him with book reports, he doesn't remember names of the people and places. All people are called “he,” and all places are called “there.” Damien talks in a jumble. He gets his facts out of order. His teacher has noticed this too. What is wrong? How can we help him? ”

—Marshall

Types of Stories

Telling a story or talking about something that happened is also called narrative discourse. Stories are about real or imagined people and events. Three types of stories, or narratives, are:

- Personal - you talk about something that happened to you. It can be a story about your day, your friends, or a childhood memory. Many conversations that children have with their friends are personal narratives. They ask and answer questions like “What did you do this weekend?”
- Story retell - you retell the events of a story from a book or a movie.
- Fictional - you make up a story or add to the story from a book or movie.

How Children Learn to Tell Stories

Telling a story takes a lot of language skills. Children need to use words about time, like yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Children need to have the words to talk about people and things that happen. Words have to be in the right order.

Children begin learning to tell stories as early as age 2. Storytelling ability is one of the best ways to predict early reading skills and later success in school.

Children learn to tell stories in a set way. They start by using short sentences, and the story may not make a lot of sense. As they get older, children add more details and focus on the plot and the characters.

Fast facts

- Some children have problems telling stories or talking about their day.
- You can help your child tell stories.
- Speech-language pathologists, or SLPs, can help too.

Tips for Telling Stories

You can help your child develop good storytelling skills. Here are some tips:

- Ask your child to talk about pictures in a book or to make up a story.
- Read stories to your child. Ask him or her to tell the story back to you while looking at the pictures.
- Ask questions to help your child give more details or tell the story in the right order. For example, ask, “Which boy fell down? What did the place look like? Did you really eat the cake and then bake it?”
- Use pictures or objects to help your child tell a story. Ask about what happened first, next, and last. This will help your child tell the story in the correct order.

- Tell a story about your day.
- Ask your child to talk about things that happen during the day. Ask about day care, school, special times, and holiday activities.

When Your Child Needs More Help

Children with language and learning problems often have problems telling stories. They may have trouble giving book reports, remembering the names and places in a story, or telling about their day. A speech-language pathologist, or SLP, can help if you are worried about your child. An SLP can find out what kinds of problems your child is having. The SLP can teach your child the parts of a story and help your child in school.

“Damien is getting help from an SLP. Now he tells me more about what he does in school. Instead of just asking him, “What did you do today?” I ask him more specific questions. This helps him organize his thoughts. He talks more about what happened in books too and is doing better in school.”

—Marshall

Telling stories is not always easy. Help is available.

To learn more about speech and language development or disorders or to find an SLP near you who has been certified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), visit www.asha.org or call 800-638-8255 or (TTY) 301-296-5650.

My SLP's name is

Appointment

Compliments of
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and