



In the wake of the stresses of the coronavirus, it is important to try to create a state of normalcy as much as possible. For young children, this is even more important due to their vulnerability and need for emotional security and stability. This includes keeping consistent with routines, like daily activities and familiar experiences, wherever possible. Reading can be an outlet to cope with stressful times and establish a sense of normalcy in a child's life.

Research has demonstrated the positive effects of reading. In a study conducted by the University of Sussex in 2009, reading was found to reduce stress up to 68%. According to Dr. David Lewis, the neuroscientist that headed this study, reading is "more than merely a distraction, but an active engaging of the imagination as the words on the printed page stimulate your creativity and cause you to enter what is essentially an altered state of consciousness."

By simply reading a book, this allows people to be invited to a fantasy world that distracts them from stressors. The results of the study found reading to be more effective in reducing stress than listening to music and drinking a cup of tea.

THE IMPORTANCE OF READING TO YOUNG CHILDREN DURING DIFFICULT TIMES

HERE ARE SOME TIPS FOR READING TO CHILDREN DURING THIS UNCERTAIN TIME:

1. **Select books that are of interest to and chosen by children:** Pick books that are selected by children and are topics of interest including hobbies, favorite characters, and things children enjoy. In times of uncertainty, giving children a choice of what they read can give them some sense of control in their lives. If books chosen are about less-desirable themes, educators and family members should emphasize the manner in which the characters cope with, empower themselves, and overcome stressful situations. These are good messages to children about strength and resiliency in the face of obstacles.
2. **Choose books that are developmentally appropriate for your age group:** Select books that are not too challenging for your child/children, and not too easy for the age group. If reading to a mixed aged population, find books that are in the middle in the level of difficulty, have alternate children select the books, and have them do things with their hands to keep their interest and attention. Sometimes older children can build leadership skills by reading to the younger ones.
3. **Use props to attract children, maintain their interest, and stimulate them:** With children's short attention spans, it is recommended to use props including puppets, to keep them stimulated and increase the enjoyment of the experience.





- 4. Select a comfortable space free of distractions:** It is important to read in a quiet, comfortable location away from windows or doors in order to reduce or prevent distractions. The temperature (not too hot or cold) and lighting (not too bright or dim) should be at comfortable levels. The location is recommended to be in rooms with soft colors (blue, green, purple, or neutral) to create a calming effect and not be overstimulating (red, yellow, and orange colors).
- 5. Keep reading interactive:** It is recommended to ask open-ended questions (how and why) to stimulate discussion, critical thinking, and vocabulary. These questions should allow the children to connect with the topic by relating their own experiences with ones found in the book.

For example, when reading I Feel Happy, by Mary Murphy, the educator or family member could extend the story to an open-ended discussion about the types of events that trigger different emotions in children, just as the dog's experience in the story. For example, they could ask, "What types of things happened to you that made you angry like Milo and Ellie and why did you feel this way?" By asking questions, the educator/family member allows the children to draw from their own experiences to connect with the characters of the book. Selecting books with universal themes (families, animals, food, holidays, weather, transportation, money, celebrations, and professions) can also be ways to connect with all children regardless of their backgrounds.

When reading The Snowy Day by Ezra Jack Keats, the educator/family member could ask children, "What types of activities have you engaged in on a snowy day similar to Peter's experiences, and how did you feel about them? Why did you enjoy your experiences in the snow?" Through the use of open-ended questions, children are able to connect the experiences of the story to their own, and thereby relate to the main character and events of the book.

Here is a list of recommended books for different age groups:

Infants:

1. Pat the Bunny by Dorothy Kunhardt: This book has events and items that are familiar to infants with the integration of tactile stimulation to attract them. There are other similar books including Pat the Puppy by the same author.
2. Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? by Eric Carle: This is a classic favorite that has repetitive questions about animals and colors. A similar book is I Went Walking by Sue Williams.
3. Goodnight Moon by Margaret Wise Brown: This book is very colorful and has pictures of everyday items found in infants' environment. This is a good book to introduce new words.
4. Baby Faces by DK: This book has colorful pictures of babies with different emotions. There are other similar books including Baby Faces by Margaret Miller.
5. Guess How Much I Love You by Sam McBratney: This book is about a hare and his father, who show how much they love each other. This can lead to questions about family and how they spend time together.

Toddlers:

1. Mr. Brown Can Moo! Can You? By Dr. Seuss: This book is fun for toddlers who are learning how to make animal and other sounds. The catchy rhymes and repetition are great for toddlers.
2. Sheep in a Jeep by Nancy Shaw: This book has short rhymes with memorable characters that start out on a journey together, but encounter problems with their transportation.
3. Welcome With Love by Jenni Overend: This book helps prepare children for the birth of a new sibling and the changes that are expected in this transition.
4. I Feel Happy by Mary Murphy: This book is about two loveable dogs experiencing a range of emotions that offers children a good introduction to feelings.
5. Chicka Chicka Boom Boom by Bill Martin, Jr.: This is a great book for introducing the alphabet to toddlers in a fun, interactive way. There are a combination of lower and upper case letters that are hoping to get to the top of a coconut tree. It is recommended to use letter props (letter cards) to accompany the book.

Preschoolers:

1. Harold and the Purple Crayon by Crockett Johnson: This book allows children to use their imagination to create different images with a purple crayon.
2. If You Give a Mouse a Cookie by Laura Joffe Numeroff: This humorous book is about the consequences of giving a mouse a cookie. This is great for talking about cause and effect of actions.
3. Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak: This book is about a boy, Max, that imagines himself living among the wild things and becomes their king. This can lead to discussions about experiences children had and how they felt about them.
4. One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish by Dr. Seuss: This colorful book is about the adventures of a boy and girl and their creature friends and pets. This book is great for learning colors and numbers.
5. The Snowy Day by Ezra Jack Keats: This book is about the fun and thrilling adventures of a little boy in the snow. This is good book for introducing the science of melting snow.