

Together time

Tips for sharing rhymes, songs and stories, using a variety of approaches for children with a range of Additional Support Needs.



Psychological Service Home Visiting Teachers (PSHVT)

Highland Council Psychological Service



Works for Positive Change

“The majority of brain development occurs in the first three years of a child’s life. Reading to and sharing books with babies and young children, and giving them time to respond, feeds their brain, helps them learn new words and grows their vocabulary.”

Literacy Trust

This booklet contains ideas to support children with additional support needs to engage with rhymes, songs and stories. The suggestions are based on experiences of working with children with a wide range of abilities. Some may be relevant to your child’s developmental stage and some will not. All the activities are intended to allow the inclusion of a sibling or family member. Try the ones that you feel will appeal to your child, based on your knowledge of their likes, dislikes and their abilities.

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Once you have looked over this booklet you may realise that you already have toys and objects at home which you could use as props and resources to support the activities. However, further examples of activities and resources are available on the Highland Council Psychological Service Blog within the [Story Saacks*](#) and [Play Ideas](#) sections.

*Saacks - ‘aac’ refers to [a](#)lternative and [a](#)ugmented [c](#)ommunication.

“AAC is a set of tools and strategies that an individual uses to solve every day communicative challenges. Communication can take many forms such as: speech, a shared glance, text, gestures, facial expressions, touch, sign language, symbols, pictures, speech-generating devices, etc”

Royal College of Speech & Language Therapists 2020

Partnership Working

If there are professionals supporting you and your child, we would recommend that you follow their specific advice around communication, movement, assistive technology and any sensory needs.

Why share rhymes, songs and stories with children?

An opportunity to feel close and have fun!

Rhymes, songs and stories can be a wonderful way for parents and carers to spend special time with their children – “Together Time”. Sharing and repeating the patterns of rhyme and rhythm can help your child to engage, anticipate, learn about language and perhaps begin to join in. They can also provide opportunities to develop your child’s imagination and creativity.

Setting up a Space

Prepare things first or they may wander off before you even get started!

Where?



Where is your child most comfortable? Do they have a special place where they like to relax? Can you create one; a settee, favourite chair, cosy corner or a space with a special blanket, cushion or bean bag? Your rhyme, song, story, or part of one, can be told anywhere e.g. you could read about Goldilocks walking in woods when you are outside; revisit her eating the porridge at your mealtimes; and at bedtime read the part where she tries out the beds!



For some children it might be best initially to just use one space. For others, using various spaces and the outdoors might help to enhance the story or part of the story as you read it to them. “Remember that bit of the story when Goldilocks ate Baby Bear’s porridge?”

When?



Rhymes, songs and stories can be enjoyed at any time of the day, but it may be important for your child to build in a consistent and comforting routine.

Choose a time when you are less likely to be disturbed and have time for “just one more”!

How?



A **quiet time** can help your child to listen and concentrate. Try reducing distractions by putting favourite toys and games away, turning off the TV and music and putting phones onto vibrate.

Make time to take things slowly and be prepared to repeat the same thing again... and again!

How often?



Rhymes, songs and stories should be repeated and shared more than once with children. As they are repeated, they become more familiar and children can increasingly recognise, anticipate and actively contribute in their own way. All this can help to improve their confidence as they know what’s coming next.

Cueing in

How will your child know it's "Together Time"?

Children might respond to different cues. For some, giving them a toy, cushion or blanket that they always associate with "Together Time" may be enough. Let them see or feel it to help build up anticipation for the activity.

You might cue them in using a photo of your chosen special place. When cueing in it can help to use the same words each time.



Dog snuggle blanket



Bookbug teddy



Crocodile snuggle blanket

**Have a favourite toy to join in;
it might be a tractor, Spiderman, a teddy or even a horse!**

Choosing the rhyme, song or story

It can help some children if you have a toy, object or picture which they can link to a specific rhyme, song or story. If you are consistent in using it, it can help cue your child in, so they know what's coming next. You can use it to support choosing if they want the activity to continue by showing it and saying, "again?"

When they are familiar with two or more you can begin to offer a choice from two. You can show them two objects they associate with the rhymes, songs or stories and look for their preference. Can they make their own choice by looking, reaching or pointing? Help them by giving them time and only having a small number of things to choose from. Two is often enough!

Allow enough time to repeat the activity and be prepared for "just one more"!

Use the same toy each time, so they know what they are choosing



"I see you looking at Twinkle
Twinkle.
Do you want me to sing it again?"



"I want Goldilocks"



"You've picked up the frog! You
want the frog song."

Motivation and Accessibility

Helping your child to develop an interest in, and independence with, books

To support your child's interest in and engagement with books you could try:

- making a photo book with pictures of their favourite toys, people, places or events and tell your own story to match these;
- finding books with their favourite characters or songs from programmes they are familiar with;
- e-Books and YouTube for interactive books, storytelling and videos of rhymes, songs or stories;
- creating your own interactive e-book with [Book Creator](#) online or the App;
- using a 'talking tin' or 'BIGmack' switch, which can be easier to activate, to play a recorded sound effect or a repetitive line from a rhyme, song or story; or
- switch adapted toys, which can be used to make characters from the story more interactive and enhance the story experience.



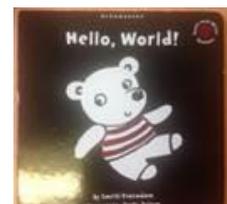
For more information visit [AAC Scotland](#).

"I do it myself"

Is the book easy to handle and visually uncluttered?



Look for books which are tactile and sturdy. It can be easier to recognise and point to objects when pictures are clear and backgrounds simple. For a child with a visual impairment it can be particularly important that there is also a good colour contrast on each page.



Can your child turn the pages themselves?



There are many ways to [adapt pages](#) to support your child to turn them independently. Gluing buttons or foam shapes firmly to the corner of pages can help to separate them so your child can get their fingers in-between. You could add ribbons or lollipops sticks, etc. and use these to help to turn a page or lift a flap.



For more information on finding, using and making books in alternative formats, visit [Call Scotland's Books for All](#).

Props and Visual supports

Using objects and visuals can support storytelling



Think about how you can visually illustrate a rhyme, song or story; how you can bring it to life for your child. Use something from around the house, such as a soft toy fish for “Hello Fish”, or a homemade spider and toilet roll ‘waterspout’ for “Incy Wincy Spider”. Props can be a way to share the experience together. Having something to hold and move may be a way of beginning to act the story out.



It can be helpful to let your child play with and explore the props at their own pace so that they become familiar and comfortable with them even before telling the story.

With a book, you could encourage your child to interact with the pictures by supporting them to look at, touch and perhaps point to details in the pictures. If they were interested, you could support them to match props to the pictures.



Props and visual supports could include:

- objects or toys matching pictures in the book or key words;
- a YouTube video of the rhyme, song or story;
- photos, laminated pictures or symbols relating to the story;
- gestures or Makaton signs for emphasising key words; and
- a homemade game relating to the rhyme, song or story.



Use props or visual supports to:

- encourage your child to choose a rhyme, song or story;
- match and make connections to the pictures in a book;
- reinforce key words by showing the object each time it's said;
- prompt your child for “more”, “again” and “finished”; and
- act out parts of the rhyme song or story.



A good way to involve your child can be by ‘acting out’ a rhyme or song with toys. This can help them understand what’s happening in the rhyme or song. Give your child time to play and explore the toys first, then try modelling a verse together.



The BBC have produced a selection of [nursery rhyme videos](#) on BBC Teach.

Using language

The importance of repetition and “pause and wait”

It's good to repeat the same rhymes, songs and stories and your child might want the same one over and over again. Using funny voices for different characters, facial expressions and actions are all things which can be part of the repetition.

Repetition helps to establish:

- the comforting rhythm and pattern of your voice as you repeat the same thing;
- the enjoyment when certain parts are said in the same way perhaps with a different voice, volume or action;
- recognition of key words;
- anticipation of knowing what comes next; and
- opportunities for children to ‘join in’.



Photo by cottonbro on Pexels.com

Some children might want to have just one part read over and over again. Be flexible and provide opportunities for this. It may be too much sometimes for you to read a whole story word for word. You could try talking about the pictures to tell the story, but you might still use repetitive phrases each time to create a routine around a book.

Even though children may not understand the words they can enjoy the rhythm of rhymes, songs and stories.



Photo by Lina Kivaka on Pexels.com

When your child knows the rhyme, song or story well a useful strategy to introduce is “**pause and wait**”. Pick a good place to pause; just before a key word or a word you have an object for and wait for a response. It might be a look to you for “more”, or they might fill the gap with a noise or a word or by touching the object. If they don't respond just fill the gap and carry on.

Some rhymes, songs and stories already include repetitive phrases, and these can also be used to introduce turn taking.

In a story like “The Three Little Pigs”, you could use a battery-operated fan for the wolf “blowing”. You could support your child to take their turn by switching on the fan at the

right place. An alternative could be to record the repetitive phrase on a “Talking Tin” or “Big Mac” switch for you or your child to activate at the right time. It can take time to develop the skills needed for this type of activity so provide plenty of opportunities to practice.



Battery-operated fan



Talking Tin

Movement Ideas

Using actions can be a simple way to encourage joint attention.

A lovely way to get your child involved in action rhymes and songs is through movement. This is a good way to help your child develop facial expression, gesture, body awareness, hand eye coordination and balance. Watching your actions can help them to learn the rhyme and anticipate what's coming next.

You could help your child to make the 'big body movements' in songs like "Row, Row, Row Your Boat", "Heads Shoulders Knees and Toes" and similar rhymes. You could support your child to make fine motor movements. Some children are happy for adults to use 'hand over hand' to help them make the actions in rhymes such as "Round and Round the Garden".



Photo by Andrea Piacquadio on Pexels.com



Being actively involved can help motivation, enjoyment and learning.

Other movement skills which can be practiced through action rhymes and songs are:

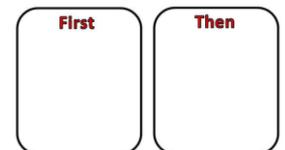
- using both hands together e.g. clapping, "down comes the rain", "wind the bobbin up";
- pointing and playing with finger puppets; and
- reaching out and across to grab hands, get toys or turn the pages of a book.

The National Youth Choir of Scotland, in partnership with Bookbug, have produced a selection of videos showing lap songs and rhymes with actions.

Finish

Prepare your child for ending the activity and moving on to the next thing.

Children don't always find it easy to finish an activity so giving a cue that it's about to end can help. Try to use the same phrase e.g. "It's nearly time to finish" or "just one more". Telling them what's happening next can also help to bring the activity to an end especially if it's something they really enjoy. Try saying, "just one more then we'll..." or "**first** we'll tidy up **then** we can have...". If your child is using a "First/Then" board with objects, pictures or symbols you can show them what's coming next.



Create your own routine around "Together Time"

Try to involve your child in tidying up any props or books, even if it's only them helping to put the last toy in a bag or box. Keep 'props' in a special place until next time.

Sometimes it can be fun and motivating to tidy up to a song or some music. It could be something you make up e.g. "This is the way we tidy up", a favourite song or some music you play in the background.



Photo by cottonbro on Pexels.com