St Jerome’s Catholic Primary School

### Sharing books with a child is a special time, a time to bond together away from other distractions; especially important in these current times of uncertainty and where normal life has changed so much, and so quickly. But how can you get the most out of sharing a picture book?

Be led by the child

Let the child take the lead role in deciding how to use the book, as the adult you can adapt to their approach and still enjoy it. We are all individual and have a preferred way to interact with a book, especially if it’s a new book! Some children like to have the story read from cover to cover first, then go back to look at some of the detail. Other children prefer to look through the book first, looking for clues in the illustrations before having it read to them. And others like to hear you tell the story, but don’t necessarily give you the time to read the words before they turn the page!

All of these ways are ok because the child is engaging and interacting with the book. Children get so much more out of the experience if they are actively involved.

Enjoy the illustrations

Books are more than just words - quite often we think of sharing or reading a book as just reading the words aloud; and we might feel like we’ve failed if we don’t manage to read the book to the end. But picture books can have as much, and sometimes more of the story, in the illustrations so take the time to enjoy them too. Look out for clues in the pictures that help your child understand what’s happening in the story; some illustrators add little characters or objects that are hiding on each page for you to find. As you read the printed words, remember to point to the illustrations to help make connections between what your child is hearing and what they are seeing.

Tell the story your own way

You could try to tell the story using only the pictures; this can easily be done when revisiting a favourite book, one where you both know the story so well. You could tell it all in your own words, or sometimes just use a word or phrase that is repeated throughout, or put the story into the characters’ words. This can be a good way to try out character voices, or to take turns to tell the story.

Have some book-talk

The more you read and share a book together the better you will know the book. And the more you know the book, the more you can talk about it! You could talk about the story, the characters, the setting or the ending. Every time there could be something different to point out or talk about. Pick an object from the illustrations and make some comments to start a discussion.

**Read to your child, regardless of how old they are**

Whether consciously or subconsciously, many parents stop reading to their children once they have learnt to read themselves; reading aloud is often considered something you do only with young children who can’t yet read.

Listening to your child read, and you reading aloud to them, are two very different activities with two very different outcomes.

Here’s why reading to a child of any age is vitally important...

**Reading isn’t just about deciphering the words on the page.** If you aren’t extracting any meaning from those words then you aren’t reading. Children are still using much of their brain power to decode individual words leaving little brain capacity to process their collective meaning. In short, by hearing the words read aloud, a child has time to picture, imagine and connect to a story. They can focus on what’s actually happening.

**A child’s reading level doesn’t catch up with their listening level until around the age of 14.** Without any discussion, a child can handle more complex language and content when they hear it read aloud.

**It gives you a joint interest and the opportunity to stimulate discussion outside of book reading.** Making connections is an important part of comprehension; by reading with your child you are able to help them see how what they have read connects to their lives or the lives of others.

**You have the power to influence their perception of reading.** Reading a story aloud with voices and expression not only helps them to better understand the meaning but it also makes reading exciting. Try to end your reading on a cliffhanger and listen to them beg for more!

**You get the sheer pleasure of legitimately reading (or re-reading) some amazing children’s books!**