

How to Use Shared Reading to Help Children Manage Stress

We all want our children to feel safe and secure. When families are going through stressful or uncertain times, when they feel threatened or witness violence, when the world around them feels turbulent, children look to their parents and caregivers to help them feel loved, safer, and more secure. Reading aloud with your child is one way to help your family manage stress.

You don't need to have the right words or all the answers to help your child through stressful moments. Simply being together, sharing a story, and offering comfort can be enough. Children of all ages — even the youngest babies — will feel loved by your voice, your presence, and your attention.

Why and How Reading Aloud Can Help

1

Children need attention. When you read aloud, whatever else may be going on in the world, you are concentrating all your attention on your child, on the book, and the story —and your child will understand this and feel reassured. Let your child take the lead —whether that means lingering on a page, skipping ahead, asking questions, or choosing the same favorite book again and again.



2

Children need physical contact and affection. Take your child on your lap or lean against one another — make storytime a moment for hugging and cuddling. The combination of your voice and your close contact will help your child feel loved and secure.

3

Children need routine. Read a story at bedtime or naptime or mealtime — it will help your child feel that the day has a predictable schedule, even in unpredictable times, and give them something to look forward to.



4

Children need entertainment. Read books that make your child laugh, books that make your child eager to turn the page and find out what happens next, books that use call and response, and books in which you — or they — can make funny voices or animal sounds. Encourage them to directly interact with the story.

**5**

Children need a sense of security. Even when the world is full of scary questions, a young child can find some security in a parent's voice and embrace. If your child shares worries or strong feelings, it's okay to acknowledge them gently: "That sounds scary" or "It's okay to feel sad sometimes." You don't need to fix the feeling — being there with them matters most. This is a time to turn to well-loved books and share familiar stories.

**6**

Children need connection. Reading together is more than sharing a story — it's a shared experience. Sitting close, turning pages together, laughing at the same moments, and returning to favorite books creates a sense of togetherness that helps children feel deeply connected to you. These small, everyday moments build trust and strengthen your bond, reminding your child that you are a steady, loving presence they can count on — especially when the world feels uncertain.

**7**

Children need to feel loved. Reading aloud is a way to show your child, every day, how much you care, and how important it is to you to spend time together. It's a way to hold your child close and help your child feel loved, cared for, and protected. Even a few minutes of shared reading can help your child feel calmer, closer, and more secure — and can be comforting for you, too.



In uncertain times, your presence matters more than perfection. You are your child's safe place. Your voice, your arms, and your time together are enough.

Find tips on reading with your children and how to choose the right books, curated booklists, and evidence on how shared reading strengthens connections at reachoutandread.org/resources.

Scan the QR code to access more family resources.

