FACT SHEET – Story Time

Are you keen to review or run Story Time sessions at your library? This fact sheet provides supportive information and ideas about delivering a quality First 5 Forever Story Time program. Give it a go as it can be lots of fun!

What is Story Time?
Story Time, or a similarly named session, is a fun, interactive half hour program for 2-5 year old children and their parents and primary caregivers. A story is either read or told and interaction with the content is encouraged and supported. Stories may be combined with an activity, song or similar stories on a related theme. It facilitates adult-child interaction, pre-literacy support and communication development.

A video about Story Time is available at the First 5 Forever web page.

Aims of Story Time
- Encourage and nurture a love of books and reading for children and their parents and primary caregivers.
- Model best practice in communication and pre-literacy activities for 2-5 year old children using age appropriate resources and material.
- Create a supportive environment for parents and primary caregivers to interact and engage with their child.
- Provide positive key messages on the important role parents and primary caregivers play in their child’s language and early literacy development.
- Increase skills and confidence of parents and primary caregivers to use age appropriate language and early literacy activities at home with their child.
- Introduce the library as a free, safe, welcoming place that offers a range of programs, services and resources for 2-5 year old children and their families.
- Reduce parents’ and primary caregivers’ social isolation by building relationships with other families, library staff and community service providers supporting young children.

Recommended skills to deliver Story Time
Library staff, early childhood educators or local community Artsworkers can run a Story Time session. To deliver a quality program, the following skills are recommended:
- An ability to communicate well with young children and their families.
- Familiarity with a range of age appropriate books, songs and activities that connect with children and encourage interaction throughout the session.
- An awareness of early childhood development and how Story Time sessions support a child’s language and early literacy development.
- An ability to share key messages, ideas and strategies with parents and primary caregivers about their important role and how to support their child’s language and early literacy development at home.
- Enthusiasm and a flexible nature to adapt the program content and format rapidly to maximise the engagement of children of multiple ages.
- Knowledge of library resources, including from State Library, and local community services that support families and their 2-5 year old children.
Helpful tips for running Story Time
Consider these tips when reviewing or preparing your Story Time session.

Before the session
- Create a space that invites parents and primary caregivers to be physically close to their child (preferably on the floor) so that they can engage and interact with them.

Beginning of the session
- Welcome parents, primary caregivers and children.
- Introduce yourself and why Story Time is important.
  “Sharing and talking about books with your child in the time before school is the single most important activity you can do to help them learn to read and write once they start school.”
- Invite parents and primary caregivers to switch their mobile phones to silent to encourage their active participation.
- Include a consistent start to the session to provide structure, familiarity and positive associations around the session for young children.

During the session
- Use an age appropriate story, and related activities, songs and similarly-themed stories to encourage interaction between parents/caregivers and their child.
- Include messages (i.e. language and early literacy messages) for parents and primary caregivers about the choice of content, a particular book, and ways to repeat activities from the session at home (Refer to key messages for parents and primary caregivers).
- Model how to pause, comment and encourage conversations with children while sharing a story. The way we share books is just as important as how often we read to children.
  “What do you think will happen next?” “That pig looks hungry!”
- Whenever possible, relate a story to children’s’ experiences as it encourages further learning and understanding.
  “Has anyone been on a boat?”
- Slow down the pace and be aware of tempo as 2-5 year old children need time to engage and respond.
- Include physical actions (e.g. clapping, finger plays or props to hold) to encourage interaction and build motor skills. It also supports kinaesthetic learning styles. (Borrow props from State Library).
- Throughout the session provide encouragement to the group, as well as to individual parents, primary caregivers and children, to reinforce positive messages and behaviours.

End of the session
- Include a consistent finish to the session to provide structure, familiarity and positive associations around the session for children.
- End with an important take away message for parents and primary caregivers around the benefits of shared reading, talking, singing songs and playing with children at home.
- Hand out age appropriate activity sheets that relate to the Story Time session for children to do at home.

Following the session
- Put on a morning tea to provide time for parents and primary caregivers to connect with each other and library staff.
- Ensure library staff are available to suggest similar books to borrow as well as information on other programs, resources and services for 2-5 year old children.
- Offer advice and support to parents and primary caregivers about their role in supporting their child’s language and early literacy development.
Positive First 5 Forever messages for parents and primary caregivers

Parents and primary caregivers play an important role in supporting their child’s language and early literacy development. Messages to share with them include:

- Parents and primary caregivers are their child’s first and most important teacher.
- Nurture your child’s love of language by reading together, sharing rhymes, singing songs, telling stories or playing with them.
- Reading with children is the single most important activity families can do with their children before school to help them learn to read and write once they start school.
- Being read to at an early age is critical in terms of a child’s social, cognitive, emotional and language development, and their overall well-being. (Let’s Read Literature Review, 2013).
- Everyday opportunities are the best for learning – point out, name and talk about what your child can see or hear (e.g. during bath time, when cooking dinner or going for a walk, while shopping).
- Lots of incidental talking happens at home – talk about what you’re doing, what you can see, and what interests your child with them as it provides information from which they can learn.
  
  “Put on your hat please? Let’s find your shoes! Which book shall we read first?”
- During the first 3 years, a child’s brain undergoes significant development. To provide a strong brain structure for future learning, children need experiences such as sharing books, talking together, singing songs and time interacting with important adults in their life (Let’s Read Literature Review, 2013).
- Sharing and talking about books provides the best learning. It’s OK to read slowly, skip pages, talk about the pictures and what interests your child, and not finish a book.
- Children love to hear the same stories over and over. If you are bored, we have heaps of books for you, here at the library!
- If there are words in books or rhymes that are unfamiliar don’t change them or skip them. Where possible, match the word and picture to the real object or action (e.g. show them a real ball, do the action for stomp!).
- It’s important that your child can see your face when communicating. Crouch down or lift up your child to let them know you are listening.
- Young children need time to communicate. Pause to enable your child time to use sounds, gestures or words. It helps them to practise sounds, try new words and encourages turn taking.
- TV, mobile phones and smart devices do not often encourage learning – children learn best from ‘hands on’ interactive experiences with important adults in their life.
- Make comments about what your child is doing, rather than asking too many questions, as this gives them information from which they can learn.

Accessing further support

An overview of a Story Time session for library staff is available at the First 5 Forever web page. A video about Story Time along with a promotional trailer will be available soon.

Send a sample of your current Story Time session to the First 5 Forever Co-ordinator at State Library to receive supportive and constructive feedback from a Speech Pathologist who is consulting on First 5 Forever. Video footage should record the Story Time session from start to finish and capture the interactions between the facilitator and the group.

Contact Us

If you have questions, feedback or ideas regarding this Story Time fact sheet, email first5forever@slq.qld.gov.au or phone 07 3840 7927 to speak with the First 5 Forever Co-ordinator.