



## ADVICE TO PARENTS ON FAMILY STORYTELLING

Stories are one of the greatest gifts a parent or grandparent can give to their child. Reading to your child is a great way of spending quality time together but there is always the book between you and them. When you tell stories there is much greater opportunity for your child to contribute to the story, it also gives you the freedom to tailor the story to suit your child or tell stories that have never been written down.

Traditionally stories have been used to teach children important lessons for life, the importance of kindness, courage in adversity and that no matter how bad things get there is always hope for the future. True stories about family members can draw children and adults, into a deeper understanding of their family. The stories you remember from your childhood can be shared and enjoyed again with your children.

### So how do you begin?

First choose a story you want to share with your child.

You can find a section on folk tales in the majority of public libraries; stories with repetition and a simple structure are easiest to learn.

Or create your own story from your imagination or from your life.

You know what you and your children are interested in.

Most of what we convey to each other by word of mouth we tell in story form – from something we've seen, through last night's television, to what family and folk stories you might like to learn to tell for the future. Draw on and nurture the natural gift we all have.

### Learning your story

We recommend that tellers learn their stories image by image, rather than word for word. If it is a written story read it a couple of times and then put the book down. Run it through your mind like a silent movie, visualise the scene and watch the action. Then add the script, what are the people saying to each other? Keep it simple, you can elaborate when you tell it aloud. Make sure you know the story well enough to answer listeners' questions which usually follow if an audience has been attentive.

Some people learn by visualising the story. It may help you to draw a cartoon strip or map of your story, or to write down key words or phrases. Others find it easier to learn by listening to the story. You could tell your story onto a tape, or other recording device, and listen to it. Try both and see which works best for you.

Make sure it has a clear beginning and a firm end. There are lots of traditional beginnings and endings to stories. "Once upon a time" works fine if you don't want to search around for something more exotic. To end you could use "And they all lived happily ever after" or you could try a more realistic variant. For family stories you could start with "Did I ever tell you about..." and finish with "And if you don't believe me you just go and ask..."

### Telling your story

The best time to tell your story is when both teller and listener are relaxed. Bedtime is popular, but storytelling is also a great way to shorten a long journey. Choose a time that suits you.

Settle down somewhere comfy, if you have just one child they might want to snuggle up on your lap, otherwise find somewhere you are all close together, say you want to tell them a story so they get into listening mode.

Don't worry if you get stuck or forget something, ask them what they think happened next or add in the detail you forgot later. You may end up with a different story than the one you started with; you now have your own family version of the story.


The most important thing is to enjoy sharing time and a story you love with the people you love. Include your partner if you can. Once they get the hang of it you will find your children will want to tell you stories too.

### Storytelling events

You and your family might enjoy going to listen to other storytellers. There are events all over the country where professional storytellers and storytelling enthusiasts share stories. Local libraries, arts centres and country parks often have story times so keep a look out for them and ask about them when you visit.

***For more information on storytelling contact  
the Society for Storytelling  
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