

Narratives... Can Your Child Tell Stories?

Between the ages of 4 and 5, children become better at telling stories. They can tell you about the events and activities in their lives with reasonable sequence and detail. They are able to re-tell simple stories (e.g. common fairy tales they have heard) or relate the events in a favorite movie. Narratives are one of several types of communication we use daily as we interact with each other. The ability to use narrative forms of communication (story telling) is an important social and academic tool.

Many children with language delays or disorders find it hard to tell stories that others can easily understand. Their oral and written stories are confusing to their parents, teachers and friends.

How can you help?

Model story structure by telling stories about your day or about past events. At first, keep the stories short and simple. Use words like first, next and last. Family patterns differ but the “remember when” stories we tell over and over again can build lasting memories. They create a framework that will help your child tell his own stories.

Encourage your child to talk about experiences every day. Open ended questions (e.g. What did you think about that?) in which the child has to provide information are better than yes/no questions (e.g. Was Daddy there?) or questions that target only one specific type of information (e.g. Who was there?).

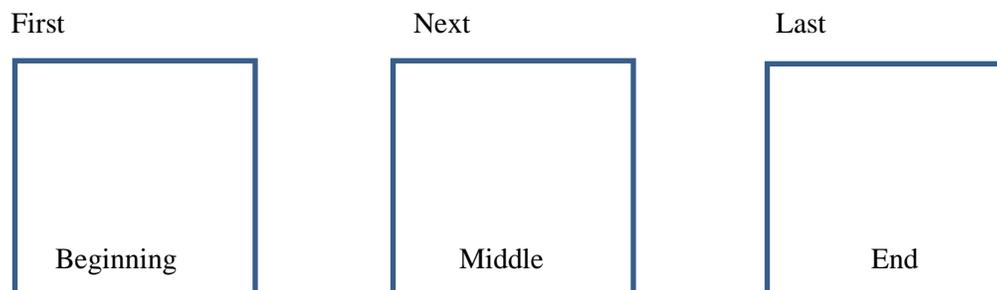
Ask questions that foster elaboration. Try this when your child is telling you a story about something that happened during his day and you are confused because his story is disorganized or he leaves out some information. These questions are similar to the kind you would ask after reading a story with your child. For example:

	Questions when reading a story	Questions when talking about personal past events
Beginning	Who was the story about? Where/ when did the story happen? What happened first?	Who was there? Where/ when did we go? What did we do first?
Middle	What happened next? Why do you think that happened? What happened after that?	Tell me what happened. Was it fun? How did that feel?
End	What happened at the end? What did you think about that?	What did we do afterwards?

Make up stories about single pictures and create stories using wordless picture books. Check your public library for copies of one of the top ten wordless books described at <http://childrensbooksguide.com/wordless> . The descriptions on this site can help you choose a book you think might interest your child.

Encourage story “re-tells”. Do this as a game rather than a test! You might start by taking turns re-telling a favorite story. Children often love it when they can catch adults “making mistakes” so you might do things like stating events in the wrong sequence or attribute an action to the wrong character when it is your turn. Encourage your child to correct you!

Talk about story “structure” with your child. Story structure is also called story grammar. At the simplest level, all stories have a beginning, middle and an end. When doing story re-tells, it can help to draw story frames (boxes) to help a child organize these concepts:



You can draw stick figures and label them to denote characters, or ask the child in which “box” he would put different events. Then have him re-tell the story using this visual support.

Summarize stories to improve organization and to highlight the most important facts. When your child tells you a story, summarize it for him to model how this is done.

For more information on narrative development check out Handy Handouts: Narrative Stages at <http://www.superduperinc.com/handouts/pdf/350%20Narrative%20Stages.pdf>

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