

Tips for Families:

# Building Early Relational Health Through Reading and Sharing Books



[Early Words](#) and [Reach Out and Read](#) are examples of programs that give healthcare providers the tools they need to encourage caregivers to read and share books with their little ones. This builds baby brains and develops all-important early literacy skills.

But the benefits don't stop there: reading together and sharing books also supports early relational health.

## What is early relational health?

Early relational health is a term that describes the positive, nurturing relationship between child and caregiver that builds the little one's emotional security and well-being.



## How does reading and sharing books with a child promote early relational health?

Sharing books and stories is an excellent way to contribute to – and strengthen – the warm, nurturing bonds between a child and their caregiver. It does this by encouraging physical closeness, eye contact, mutual engagement, and mutual responsiveness, which builds early relational health.



Healthcare providers can guide caregivers on how to develop early relational health through the sharing of books and stories by encouraging them to:

**Cuddle up for story time**

Snuggle, hold or sit beside your baby to make sure they can feel your touch and see the pages.

**Make eye contact**

Look at each other and smile. Let your little one see your happy face to help them feel safe and secure in your relationship.

**Interact with baby**

Respond to your little one's expressions, interests, noises and movements as you share the book.

**Talk and ask questions**

Connect the story to things in the child's life (for example, "Who's the tallest in your family?") or ask about what is happening in the book (for example, "That child is petting a horse. Would you like to pet a horse someday?")

**Choose a book that you both enjoy**

Make reading time fun – try using silly voices or making the sounds of the animals in the pictures.

**Share your own stories**

Make it personal! Tell your baby your own family stories, such as the story of their birth, how you chose their name, or what is going on around them.

Please visit [www.childrensliteracy.ca](http://www.childrensliteracy.ca) for more tips!



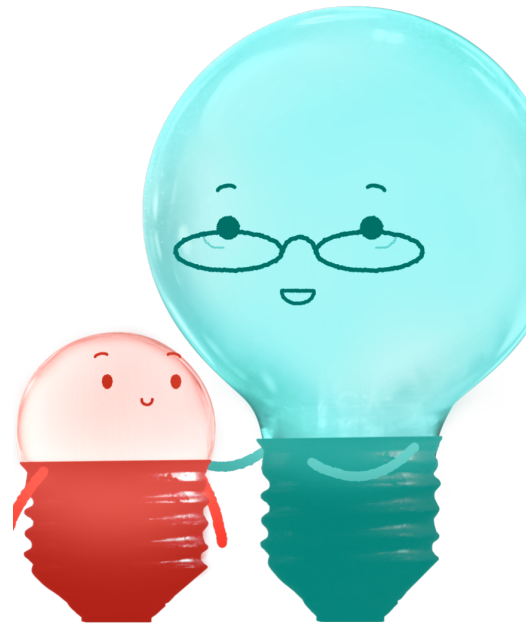
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Common Questions:

# Building Early Relational Health Through Reading and Sharing Books



What are some benefits these activities have on overall wellness?



For the child, early relational health activities can promote:

- Positive mental health
- Healthy emotional regulation
- Confidence
- Resilience
- Language and brain development

Reading and sharing books together can promote:

- Ability to communicate about their emotions
- Self-esteem
- Positive home learning environment
- School readiness



For the caregiver-child relationship, early relational health activities can:

- Improve the ability to recognize the other person's mood and feelings
- Help child and caregiver develop a shared goal and respond to challenges together
- Help build bridges between ideas

Reading and sharing books together helps:

- Build attachment between child and caregiver (the strong connection that makes babies feel secure and loved)



For caregivers, early relational health activities can:

- Promote a sense of competence, connection, and overall well-being

Reading and sharing books together can:

- Reduce risks of maternal depression
- Reduce the parent's stress levels
- Promote a less harsh parenting style

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