



Growing Listening, Language, and Literacy Skills

TIPS FOR LSL INTERVENTIONISTS

By Hearing First



Growing Listening, Language, and Literacy Skills: Tips for LSL Interventionists

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Dear Friends,

Let me start by saying thank you for what you are doing as early interventionists to guide and coach children who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families as they embark on the challenging yet exciting journey of learning to listen and talk. We all strive for children to develop literacy and reading skills commensurate with their hearing friends by third grade. We believe this goal can be a reality if we start early, provide children access to all the sounds of speech through their ears, keep a focus on literacy from day one, and set the expectation this is possible.

The Hearing First Team created this eBook as a resource to support you as you guide and coach families of children who are deaf or hard of hearing (D/HH) who are learning to listen and talk. By beginning from day one, we are impacting brain development to help children acquire early literacy skills and reach their full potential.

How can you use this eBook? I hear from many professionals that while they know and understand the importance of emergent literacy skills, they need tools to apply them in their Listening and Spoken Language (LSL) intervention sessions with families. I hope the information in this book provides new tools to encourage, engage, and empower families to try these strategies and techniques at home every day. You may also want to refer to the [Listening and Reading Connection](#) section of our website for more resources.

I would also like to personally invite you to join our Hearing First Professional Learning Community, where your peers from around the country are sharing their ideas on a daily basis. You can click [here](#) to join us!

Sincerely,
Teresa Caraway, PhD, CCC-SLP, LSLS Cert. AVT
CEO, Hearing First
www.hearingfirst.org



Chapter 1

Read Together, Learn Together

“Encourage families to start early from day one.”

There is a direct connection between the development of Listening and Spoken Language (LSL) and literacy skills, such as reading and writing. By incorporating full time wear of hearing devices and the listening and reading connection into a baby’s daily life, families of children with hearing loss can grow their child’s brain for a lifetime of reading and unlimited possibilities.

When many families think about learning and literacy, they envision school-aged children. In reality, we know the road to reading begins much earlier. It sounds improbable, but as an LSL interventionist, you know the LSL journey is incredible and very possible!

Ask your families to take a moment and imagine a child who is learning to read. Ask them to close their eyes and see what comes to mind. Did they picture a freckle-faced kindergartener hunched over his first book? Perhaps they imagined a little girl with braids in her hair, trying to sound out a word she has never seen before.

Help families understand: **We begin working on literacy skills in the cradle, not the classroom.**

In your LSL intervention sessions with families, observe together how their baby takes in information about the world around them. Long before they memorize their ABCs, their early hearing experiences create pathways in the brain needed to learn to listen and talk, and later to read and write.

As you guide and coach families to have meaningful interactions, how you encourage parents to engage with their babies is especially important.

TIPS FOR FOR LSL SUCCESS:

We know that not only can children with hearing loss learn to listen and talk, but they can achieve learning, literacy, and LSL outcomes on par with their hearing friends. Here are the four keys to achieving LSL success.

- **Identify hearing loss early.** Do you know the hearing status of the children you serve?
- **Provide complete information** to and facilitate open communication with families so they can confidently make informed choices for their child.
- **Make decisions about hearing technology quickly.** Within days of birth, a baby can be fitted with hearing aids to provide their brain with access to sound. What pediatric audiological resources can you provide to families to ensure their children have appropriate hearing technology?
- **Encourage parents** for their baby to wear their hearing devices during all waking hours and enroll their baby in early intervention services from the beginning and attend sessions regularly. No family needs to take the LSL journey alone.

In order for children who are D/HH to achieve literacy outcomes on par with their hearing friends by third grade, their brains need access to sound. The sooner a child with hearing loss receives the intervention they need, the better.

If you are serving children and families with LSL strategies and techniques, the great news is that the strategies you use to coach them to learn to listen and talk are the same building blocks that help them learn to read.

TEACHING BABIES TO READ IN ONE SIMPLE STEP

There is one easy thing you can encourage families to do for just minutes a day that can prepare their child to learn and read on their own in the future: reading. It's not complicated or time consuming. Parents don't even have to be trained educators or reading specialists to do it.

Parents should read aloud to their child for 15 minutes every day. It's that easy. Science tells us when a parent or caregiver reads to a child regularly, they:

- Create happy, early memories around reading.
- Build positive emotional associations with books.
- Introduce new vocabulary words in meaningful stories.

- Establish a lifelong habit of daily reading to be carried into adulthood.
- Prepare their child for literacy and school success.

Additionally, guide and coach parents to have their child wear their hearing technology all waking hours. Eyes open, technology on!

Reading aloud doesn't always occur to families until their baby gets older. They may be thinking, "How much can my baby hear, let alone understand?" By encouraging families to make time for regular reading, they are able to help their child gain important LSL and literacy skills that will pave the way for their success in school and in life.

[Here](#) are a few strategies you can share with families building literacy skills through sharing books every day.





Chapter 2

The Benefits of Books with Repeatable Lines

“Embed LSL strategies into routines of sharing books.”

The more words a child hears in their first years of life, the better their vocabulary and language will become. The same meaningful interactions and repeated experiences between parents and children that grow their brain for LSL also begin building the foundation for literacy.

Teaching a child who is deaf or hard of hearing to read can be a fun time of learning and exploration. By using tools like predictable books which we will discuss below, together you can implement important LSL strategies as children start learning to read.

Ask families to take a second to look back to their early childhood and try to remember their favorite books. Were they constantly returning to the same book that kept them engaged and entertained? Did the words flow together with ease? Could they memorize and recite each line without looking at the book?

As it turns out, there is actually a rhyme and reason to these writing styles used by popular children’s book authors. Experts call books using repeatable lines “predictable books.” This practice is a key factor in helping children learn spoken language and enjoy reading. When you introduce books with repeatable lines in your intervention sessions, you are guiding families along the path to help their child to listen, talk, and read on par with their hearing friends by the third grade.

SIMULATE WITH SOUND:

The focus of early literacy for babies is to hear the spontaneous language of their family. With appropriate hearing technology, repeatable lines in books create opportunities for families and their children to play with sounds and words. When sounds are predictable, they create a pattern of listening that gives children more opportunities to catch the phrases and practice listening to them.

Try It Out:

When sharing books in the intervention session, play with the rhymes by singing them or chanting them in the same rhythm each time. Encourage families to repeat the following strategies used at intervention sessions at home.

PREDICT AND PLAY:

When books are predictable, babies can listen for patterns, making it easier for them to listen and learn. Instead of just listening to their parents read, guide children to anticipate what comes next and participate in the story.

Try It Out:

When reading books with predictable patterns in an LSL intervention session, guide and coach families to stop at various points in the story to see if the child fills in the missing word or phrase. Encourage this practice at home.

READ WHAT YOU HEAR:

Predictable books recited over and over allow young children to read and reread the story, before they even know how to read by themselves. This helps them begin to understand the early literacy practice, memorize lines, and gain confidence in their reading ability.

Try It Out:

Read the same book over several LSL intervention sessions and take turns “reading” with the child, making sure to accept the child’s version of the story. Talk about aspects of the storyline that promote their speech and language learning goals. Remind families that repeatedly reading books over and over is a good practice.

Reading predictable books with repeatable lines early on can be a helpful tool when guiding and coaching families to teach their child how to read. For a list of books using repeatable lines, [download our handout](#) with more than 100 of our favorite titles for you to share with children and their families! This list of predictable books can help build reading confidence while advancing their overall LSL outcomes.





Chapter 3

How to Make Your Own Flap Books

“Engage families who have limited experience or resources.”

Creating flap books is an easy and economic way to get the most out of the books and keep children engaged in early literacy.

Reading aloud, sharing books, and singing with the families and children you serve does wonders for their LSL development. As families engage with their children, they become familiar with the sounds of speech, vocabulary words, spoken language, print, and the value and joy of books. Share with families often that these are all important building blocks for early literacy and will help their children do well in school and later life. Plus, it is a lot of fun and provides great social and emotional bonding time!

As you raise the bar and expectations for each child, focus on reading aloud and sharing books to introduce new and different vocabulary in addition to the day to day words they hear. This triggers their imagination, taking them to new and different places to help them learn about the world.

Sometimes little ones are busy bees and need more interactive and novel approaches to reading time. One strategy is to introduce “lift-the-flap” books. The pictures hidden behind flaps create an element of surprise that is highly interesting to young children. While there are many “lift-the-flap” books you can buy or check out from your library, you can easily turn any book into a “lift-the-flap” book with just a pad of Post-it® notes.

Share these steps with your families and practice with their children in your LSL intervention sessions.

1.

Take a book and use Post-it® notes to cover several pictures on each page. The Post-it® note creates a flap the child can remove or peel off. And you don't have to worry about the flap getting torn off like you do in ready-made "lift-the-flap" books!

2.

Talk about the object or picture that is covered. Name the object and make the Learning to Listen (LTL) sound. Encourage the child to vocalize or attempt to imitate the LTL sound. As they get older, don't just stick to labels. Provide clues about what might be hidden behind the flap such as, "This is an animal, it lives on the farm, it gives us eggs, and it says, 'bak bak bak.' Do you know what it is?" Expect and encourage a response from the child. Older children may reply, "Chicken?" While younger children may first reply by making the LTL sound. It all just depends upon the child's level.

3.

Have the child lift or peel off the Post-it® note. Talk more about the picture. Make comments or sing a fun made-up song together about what is on the page.

Such simple things are big-time learning opportunities for children with hearing loss.

- It uses the LSL strategy Audition First, which emphasizes letting a child hear a sound before it is shown to them. This strategy is important for growing the child's brain to understand spoken language.
- It also uses the strategy Sabotage, which capitalizes on the unexpected to keep the child's attention as well as teaches them flexibility in their thinking and language skills.
- It provides opportunities for children to follow familiar commands, such as, "lift the flap." Babies understand language many months before they begin saying their first words.

Help families understand familiar commands and phrases in routines that happen over and over to help their child start making sense of the auditory information around them. It is a great diagnostic tool for both interventionists and parents in an LSL partnership to note when a child begins following familiar commands.

Research has shown that reading aloud and sharing books is one of the most important things adults can do early to make a significant difference in a child's later success in school. We know this to be true for children who are deaf who are fitted with appropriate hearing devices and wear them all waking hours. Creating your own "lift-the-flap" books are not only fun but also a great investment in your client's future.

[Here's a guide](#) so you can get flapping today!



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Chapter 4

How to Make Your Own Experience Books

“Encourage families to find opportunities for more shared experiences.”

Experience books are an effective technique for developing the skills a child needs for conversational competency.

“What did you do today?” This is a common question families ask their young child, hoping for an answer with more than “I don’t know” or no response. Since you may not spend every day with their child, you really want to know what activities they enjoyed or what made them smile.

This may be a particular goal for the children you serve. Sharing and describing personal experiences requires an ability to know what information the listener needs, the order in which to provide the information, how much detail to include, and how the listener will relate to the story. This is a tall order for little ones to master.

Early learning research has reinforced to families that sharing books and reading aloud will help children in language and literacy development. Research has also emphasized that oral narrative development, the ability to share about yourself and your experiences descriptively, requires more than just exposure to reading aloud: It requires meaningful conversation practice. This can occur through sharing conversations about a book as well as engaging in ongoing conversations about events and daily routines.

What you're working toward in LSL intervention and daily LSL living in the home is communication competence. Communication competence means more than learning specific vocabulary words and understanding grammar. You want the children you serve to listen, speak in sentences, ask questions, think creatively, solve and verbalize solutions to problems, and engage in sharing their experiences with others. In LSL intervention, you begin with a focus on typical developmental milestones and practice talking about the here and now. Then, through the use of LSL strategies, language comprehension and expression expands to sharing past experiences and relating to the experiences of others. When children have conversations with others about similar experiences, they develop more meaningful relationships and expand social skill development.

One technique for developing the skills needed for conversational competency is creating experience books. An experience book is a book created with the child and family to capture what is important in the child's world. These books feature the child as the main character to help them relate their experiences after the event has occurred. Coach families in the activity of creating experience books at home with their children after meaningful moments. For example, an experience book might be created after a trip to the zoo, grocery store, or after a daily routine, such as getting ready for bed.

Experience books can be a memory key for sharing events with others. They can provide the scaffolding for the child to move beyond talking about the here and now to talking about past or more remote events. Ask the children and families you serve to create experience books at home and bring them to share in the intervention session for practice toward their LSL goals.

SO HOW DO YOU GET STARTED?

Experience books can be as simple as paper folded into a book, photographs collected and attached with ring binder clips or placed in a photo album, or objects placed in a small plastic bag and taped to a page. Books can be drawn with pencil or crayon, or favorite objects can be glued or stapled on the pages. Some interventionists and parents enjoy using digital apps to create books and stories from images taken on their phone.

Whatever the format, the act of creating the book, dictating and writing the words associated with the action, and then retelling the story multiple times will help children gain the oral language practice needed to develop communication competence.

We've provided [a handout](#), "How to Make an Experience Book," to guide you and the families you serve as you grow an engaging conversationalist through rich and meaningful experiences.



Come and meet the animals on the farm.



Chapter 5

Reluctant Reader

“Enjoy each child’s journey to develop LSL and literacy on par with their hearing friends and reach their full potential.”

Reading is crucial to early brain development and literacy in children who are deaf or hard of hearing. However, it can often be a struggle for families to get their child interested in being read to. Here are some tips on how you can guide and coach families to have successful reading sessions with their child.

Every LSL interventionist and parent has experienced it: the push and pull of reading to small children. Sometimes they want the ninth story in a row, but you are just too tired to relent and read on. Just as often, it’s the other way around. You sit down to bond over a good book, and the child pops up to run around when you read every other line.

WHY START NOW?

It may be tempting for families to think, “Why fight it? We’ll read more when they can sit still.” But it’s crucial in LSL intervention to stress wearing the hearing devices and reading aloud as daily habits from the very beginning.

Emphasize that the road to literacy begins at birth. Reading aloud daily is one of the most important ways families can ensure their child’s brain is ready for reading. Reading aloud to a child from birth has many great benefits, such as building connections in the brain, facilitating language development, and creating positive associations of reading for the child.

JUST BECAUSE IT'S IMPORTANT DOESN'T MEAN IT'S ALWAYS EASY

LSL interventionists and families can value reading and still struggle to get their children interested in being read to. If a child struggles to stay still for even short periods, the battle to get them to sit for a story might seem overwhelming. Sometimes parents may not have age-appropriate expectations for what their burgeoning book lover can reasonably enjoy.

IDEAS TO TRY AT READING TIME:

These ideas are designed to make reading time more enjoyable for small children and their families. Talk about and practice these in your LSL intervention sessions with families first, then ask families to choose one they would be willing to try at home. Add more from the list over time and discover which ones were effective for their reluctant reader.

- **Establish a routine.** Children thrive with rhythm and routine. Building books into their daily routine is a great way to start a successful habit.
- **Reading at bedtime** is often a good idea, since it is likely the child is not as active as they prepare to sleep. Make sure the room is quiet and comfortable.
- **Snack time and meals** are also great times for read aloud sessions. While the child is enjoying their favorite snack and seated at the table or in a high chair, read a book, or two (or three).
- **Make reading a family affair.** If there are older children in the house, get them involved. While an active child is in their car seat, ask an older child to read aloud on the way to your destination.
- **Set the example.** Modeling is a powerful teacher. Let the child see their family members reading. This allows literacy to become one of the many things they will want to mimic as they grow.
- **Give yourself permission to skip parts.** Remember, a “win” doesn’t require reading every word. If there’s too much text to hold a child’s attention, feel free to paraphrase. It’s more important to end the read aloud session on a successful note, even if that means telling the story in your own words.
- **Build story stamina.** There’s no need for a parent to read the *Moby Dick* of children’s books right away. Start in short increments and build the length of time that the child will listen. Start with a one-minute story, if that’s how long they will tune in. Next time, expand to two minutes (and so on).
- **Employ silliness to get back on track.** If a child becomes fussy, try to do something unexpected such as singing, sound effects, or a different voice to re-establish interest. Then wrap things up quickly.

- **End on a high note.** Finish a reading session by letting the child know how much fun it was to share a story with them.
- **Don't give up.** Keep in mind, coaching a child to enjoy reading together may take some time and practice. A good phrase to remember is "practice makes better" (not perfect).

A READ-ALoud RESOURCE FOR INTERVENTIONISTS

Reading aloud to an infant is a very different task than reading aloud to a crawler, a walker, or a constant question asker. There are strategies to help at each age and stage of a child's development.

What is reasonable to expect? How do you know if a child is engaged? Jim Trelease's book *The Read Aloud Handbook* discusses the developmental stages of reading aloud, so families and caregivers know what to anticipate and emphasize during daily reading sessions.

To capture some of the principles and practices outlined in the 6th edition of Trelease's book, Megan Murray Katz and Kathryn Wilson created the handout "Read Aloud - Stages, Strategies, and More for Children Birth-Three".

IT INCLUDES:

- The characteristics of children at various developmental stages.
- Helpful hints for reading aloud to children depending on age and stage.
- Popular book titles to consider for each stage.

Consider printing [the handout](#) and posting it near a bookshelf or play area. Share the resource with families and point out what skills their child can work on. You can revisit the list to monitor progress, try new strategies, shake up your routine, and adjust your approach as the child begins a new stage of development. In time, a reluctant reader can become a read aloud lover.



or an old man
snoring



ah-whooh.

ah-whooh!

A Word of Encouragement

While this eBook is not a comprehensive accounting of all an LSL interventionist needs to know and be able to do to provide literacy experiences as a component of your LSL intervention sessions, we do think it will get you started and will be a great resource for you to establish great communication opportunities for families to understand the importance of emergent literacy.

The privilege of guiding and coaching children who are D/HH toward an LSL outcome is both rewarding and challenging. Here are just a few ideas to think about as you explore literacy in your LSL partnerships with families.

EVERY LSL intervention session should include book sharing and strategies as opportunities to practice and establish reading as a priority.

It's all about the Es:

- **ENCOURAGE** wearing hearing devices all waking hours and reading aloud as daily habits from the very beginning.
- **EXPECT** every family and child to develop the skills to share books together for at least 15 minutes every day.
- **EMBED** LSL strategies in every shared reading activity.
- **ENGAGE** all families, coaching them to focus on reading in a way that fits their family life.
- **EMPOWER** families to remember that they are their child's first, best teacher. Because they know their child best, they are able to lead the way to prepare their child for a successful LSL outcome.
- **EXPERIENCE** the joy of seeing a child who is D/HH emerge a successful and lifelong reader.
- **ENJOY** each child's journey to develop LSL and literacy on par with their hearing friends and reach their full potential.

Discover. Advance. Improve. Share.

The Hearing First Professional Learning Community is an online platform for professionals to learn together and improve the LSL practice.

Collaborate with other LSL interventionists to discover new solutions and improve outcomes for children and their families. Whether you're an aspiring or advanced practitioner, you can share and grow in your skills. **There's no reason to go it alone in the digital age.**

