



Importance of Bedtime Stories

Whatever your child's age, reading together at bedtime is the perfect way to bring the day to a close. Many of us have fond memories of sharing a bedtime book with our own parents, and now do the same with our children. Yet in today's increasingly time-pressed world, the bedtime story often falls prey to our busy schedules and long working hours.

Below is a summary of 11 great reasons to make bedtime stories a priority whenever you can.

1. It's good bonding time

Whatever your child's age, sharing a bedtime story gives them a time when they have you all to themselves – something that may not happen at any other point of the day.

Indeed, research shows that 60% of us feel that reading to our children brings us closer together.



2. It improves your child's reading skills

Just because you're the one doing the reading, don't assume that your child isn't learning. You would be surprised by how much children grasp when you're reading a bedtime story, following the words and starting to recognise them on the page.

A bedtime story is also a good opportunity for shared reading, for example taking it in turns to read a page – or a paragraph, depending on your child's ability. This will give your child a daily opportunity to practise reading, while also benefiting from being read to.

3. It sparks imagination

Unicorns, wizards, fairies and monsters... Books open up whole new worlds to children, both real and imagined, and sharing a bedtime story will take them to places they'd never have dreamed of.

Books can teach your child about the world while also opening their imagination. Reading fiction provides specific information gaps that your child can fill with their own imagination, and this guesswork and decision-making stimulates the mental patterns that are fundamental to creativity.

4. It creates conversation

Any parent who's read a bedtime story will know that the words on the page are only part of the experience. You'll also be answering questions, explaining concepts and talking about what's happening on the page.

Reading together can trigger all sorts of wonderful questions and stimulate conversation, which can help children understand their own place in the world. So, while you might be in a rush to finish the book and get on with your evening, allow time in your bedtime routine to chat about what you're reading: you'll be helping your child's development and gaining a fascinating insight into how their mind works.

5. Making a routine means you won't forget

We all know that certain tasks get overlooked in the hustle and bustle of daily life, but if you make reading a part of your child's bedtime routine – as important as brushing their teeth – it means you're less likely to forget.

Don't worry, though, if there are nights when you can't read. Why not ask a family member, whether that's a sibling or a grandparent, to read your child's bedtime story instead, or, if you've been kept late at work, share a story with them over Zoom or FaceTime?

6. It expands your child's vocabulary

Did you know that children need to hear a word up to 12 times before they can start to use it themselves? Reading a bedtime story will give your child this exposure to new words (especially if you're reading the same book, night after night!) and so build their vocabulary.

Reading aloud introduces children to new words and new ways of describing the world around them. Using a wide range of vocabulary can help improve theirs.

7. It improves their emotional intelligence

Books can help little people deal with big feelings, and sharing a bedtime story can be a way into discussing difficult situations. Reading helps children recognise that they are not alone, and that others have faced the same problems and feelings as them. Sharing books also opens up opportunities to discuss difficult topics, like illness in a family member, and provides a structure to have these conversations.

Reading to your child will also expand their emotional vocabulary, giving them words for what they're feeling. This can make them better able to express themselves, and less prone to the emotional meltdowns that can happen when they're wrestling with feelings that they don't know how to talk about.

8. It encourages independent reading

Don't fall into the trap of thinking that reading to your child will make them 'lazy' and less likely to read by themselves.

A report by the Reading Agency found that children are more likely to read through free choice if reading is enjoyable in the first place, and reading to your child at bedtime is a great way to help them fall in love with books.

9. It improves mental wellbeing

The current mental health crisis amongst children is well documented, with even primary school pupils suffering from anxiety and exam stress.

Recent research by the National Literacy Trust found a link between reading and mental wellbeing, so sharing a bedtime story with your child could help to improve their emotional health.

10. It helps you (both) relax and unwind

Many of us introduce a bedtime story in the baby days as part of our little one's evening routine, and it can still help promote relaxation at bedtime even for older children.

At the end of a busy day, a bedtime story can be a way of leaving the day behind, helping the whole family switch off so that whatever stress and noise has happened throughout the day can be forgotten.

11. It's good even for children who can read by themselves

Yes, it's tempting to ditch the bedtime story once your child is an independent reader, but there are many benefits in carrying it on, even though they can read by themselves. Once children learn to read, they need to stay engaged with books that interest them, and this can often be books that are slightly more advanced than their reading level.

Reading together at bedtime gives your child access to books that might otherwise be beyond them. Even if they're reading by themselves, you can sit with them to help them with tricky words, and encourage them to keep going when it gets hard by reading them the next page or chapter to hook them in.



