P A R E N T S

listen – speak – read aloud

Striking a harmonious chord with your children

Listening

Speaking

Reading (aloud)
Dear Parents,

“Reading is a childhood adventure without limitations”, as Astrid Lindgren, the author of children’s books, so aptly put it. With this information brochure for parents, we would like to encourage you to devote yourself to the wonderful and important task of promoting the early listening, speaking, and reading skills of your child, and to further develop these skills by offering new ideas.

This brochure for parents was created as part of the project “Striking a Chord: Listening – Speaking – Reading (aloud)” carried out by Stiftung Zuhören and Stiftung Lesen (Foundations for the Promotion of Listening and Reading Skills) on behalf of the Hessian Ministry of Social Affairs and the Hessian Ministry of Education. In a first step, professionals in day care facilities and elementary schools were approached with a view to jointly bringing about significant improvements in children’s listening, speaking and reading skills, by way of cooperation in “tandem”. In order to achieve this aim, a successful educational partnership with day care facilities or schools depends largely on an effective cooperation with you, the parents.

The project “Listening – Speaking – Reading (aloud)” supports the early education of your child, conveying to your child the “core skills” of language and media competency, social skills, and communicative competence. These are essential preconditions, which are important for successful academic and professional development as well as participation in social and political life. Listening, speaking, and reading (aloud) are fun, and allow the children to enjoy texts and learn how to use them for their own relaxation.

And you, dear parents, can make a significant contribution to ensuring that this joy of listening, speaking, and reading (aloud) comes to occupy an important role in the life of your child by using books, ad-lib storytelling, audio plays, and many other options. Offering conscious listening, speaking, and reading experiences to children will help promote their differentiated language skills. Your child will enjoy discovering new things and exploring his social environment together with you.

And this is where our brochure for parents comes in: It is designed to provide you with a number of practical suggestions on how to encourage the three skills “Listening – Speaking – Reading (aloud)” in your child.

We hope you and your child will enjoy this brochure and that you, as parents, will find it equally rewarding to put it into practice.

Dorothea Henzler
Hessian Ministry of Education

Stefan Grüttner
Hessian Ministry of Social Affairs
“Say Daddy! Say Mummy”—this is more or less the way children learn to speak: Parents pronounce words, and children repeat them. Children listen very closely in order to be able to repeat words. If parents speak clearly, it is easier for children to distinguish words that sound similar (eg: back – pack, bat – cat, light – right – kite).

You can use the period from 0 – 10 years intensively to communicate verbally with your children. During this time, children literally “hang on your lips.” Children never tire of the stories you as parents can tell or read, and you should also listen when your children have something to tell you. This unity of “Listening – Speaking – Reading (aloud)” combines wonderful conversation and listening situations with a learning effect for the children – with virtually no extra effort.

When four-year-old Tamara is picked up from the day care center, she talks about her experiences at the center on the way home. Six-year-old Felix walks home from school with his friends. They talk about their day at school. Once he arrives at home, Felix wants to have lunch and doesn’t feel like talking about school right away. Later, at bedtime, he talks about school.

This example shows that children have the need to communicate at different times of the day.

Parents and childminders as well as the educational staff in kindergartens and elementary schools are generally the closest attachment figures for children. Therefore it is up to these individuals to speak with the children as frequently as possible and in the most diverse ways, and to listen to them. Four-year-old Tamara and six-year-old Felix are naturally curious, they want to know and understand everything they see and hear. Children learn to speak by listening carefully and imitating. By reading (aloud), they learn new ways to express themselves. Children learn from people, and they need relationships with people they know and trust. Oral language and styles of speech are best conveyed by people. Media, such as audio plays, audio books, computer programs or DVDs can be used as support. But they are never a substitute for personal conversation with real people! Listening, speaking, and reading (aloud) are essential preconditions for the ability to take in and categorise relevant information at a later stage. Especially for younger children, familiar adults are the ideal conversation partners.

In the family, with the childminders, at the day care centre and later at school, enhancing the basic skills of children is best achieved in cooperation with the parents. Ideally, parents, childminders and educational staff keep each other informed about what topics the children are currently interested in. This way, the listening and speaking behaviour within the family complements the day care center and school.

The Hessian educational plan sees the family, childminders, kindergarten, and school as partners who jointly support the children in developing their existing skills at different times, and develop them further by building on each other. In doing so, parents, childminders, and educational staff in kindergartens and elementary schools should forge an educational partnership characterised by mutual appreciation. This may be supplemented by stimulating learning opportunities that also encourage listening, speaking and reading (aloud). This way, the children’s natural curiosity and thirst for knowledge are fostered in a positive way by all parties involved. Children learn from adults and other children. The more parents, childminders, children, and educational staff listen to each other and
In the home of Felix and Tamara, communication is very important. The children are eager to talk about their experiences at school and kindergarten, and they always have questions for their parents to answer. The parents have an “open ear” for the conversational needs of their children. They listen attentively, encourage them to speak, and respond to their communicational needs. Reading picture books out loud and telling stories are an integral part of everyday life in the family.

A very important precondition for ensuring that children will speak, read, and write with competence later on is that you as parents listen carefully and ask questions – without interrupting the narrative flow of the children. This will also make the child feel appreciated. They are encouraged to express frankly and spontaneously whatever they happen to be preoccupied with. This prepares the ideal ground for conversation. On this basis, the listening skills, speaking skills, and an introduction to independent reading and writing are expanded playfully step by step. As the children’s coordinated movement skills (e.g., drawing with a coloured pencil, turning over the pages of a picture book, playing a musical instrument) and their ability to recognise letters and pictures as symbols for real things improve, they also expand their skills of understanding and using spoken and written texts and literature. This makes them ever more independent and creative in terms of linguistic and written expression. They develop an understanding of the real and abstract world and an ability to evaluate it and learn participate actively in it as appropriate in a given situation.

This guide offers practical examples and information on how listening, speaking, reading (aloud) can enrich daily routines, and how adopting the various ideas presented here can be a fun experience for the whole family. In addition, it includes information on where to find books and information brochures.

We hope you enjoy reading and subsequently experimenting!

Stiftung Zuhören (Foundation for the Promotion of Listening Skills)
Stiftung Lesen (Foundation for the Promotion of Reading Skills)
Looking closely

Telling stories together

Listening actively

What parents can do to establish a successful listening and storytelling situation with their children

- Go on a family trip to the local museum. You can look at many different pictures there — large, small, dark, bright, single or multi-coloured ones. Take a particularly close look at some of these pictures with your children. Back at home, have the children recount the stories told by the pictures and paint them for their own exhibition.

- Go on a family “listening excursion” outdoors in nature. Find a nice place to sit down comfortably. Now close your eyes together and listen carefully: What do you hear? What is there to be heard that cannot be seen? What can be heard from above? A variety of this game is to blindfold the children with you as father and mother playing “blind guides”. Then have the blindfolded children try to identify as many sounds as possible. Afterwards, discuss the sounds and draw a noise map. Where was there a lot of noise? Where was it quiet? What sounds did they hear? Of course, listening excursions can also be done at home.

- Listen to an audio play together, as a family. Afterwards, make a model of the main character using everyday materials, and act out the story again. Another possibility is to interrupt the play and draw the ending as a picture story.

- Think of an object and describe it without mentioning its name. Have the children guess what object you are talking about.

- A made-up fantasy story — in a fantasy language — is a lot of fun for children.

- You as a father or mother tell your children a story at bedtime. Because they want to hear the story again and again, you as have written down the story — somewhat like an novel written in letter form. The letter is rolled up and tied with a red ribbon. In the evening, it is taken out of story treasure chest and read out to the children.

- You as parents write a serial story on your computer each week. Print each chapter and put it into a story box. Have the children take the story out of the box for reading aloud on Sunday evenings. To make it more exciting, you can also print out a complete story in single chapters and then determine the order together with the children.

- You as a mother spend a lot of time writing at your computer. Devise an e-mail for your child and print it. Read the written message together with your child.

Suggestions for listening and storytelling situations

- Parents are important as a speech role model. Children imitate the way adults speak, speaking distinctly and in full sentences like their role models, listening attentively, responding to the person they are talking to, and giving others a chance to say what they have to say.

- Play games that require a lot of spoken interaction with your children.

- Ask your children questions to which they can respond in detail.

- Promote the pleasure of speaking by taking turns reading out, inventing rhymes, playing finger games, and singing songs with your children.

- Children are happy when you respond to their comments and thoughts. Careful questioning can encourage children to continue with their report.

- If you repeat the statements in corrected form, the children will perceive these corrections in a positive way.

- Look for cozy, quiet places inside and outside the home (such as: living room couch, patio lounge chair), to just sit and talk.
How parents can influence the attention levels and listening skills of their children

At first, children hear everything unfiltered. Little by little, they learn to listen. Parents can contribute considerably to helping their children discover the world of sounds around them and learn to more accurately distinguish between and identify the wealth of information, noises, sounds and music they hear over time. This helps to develop a more differentiated perception. Children become more self-confident and improve their ability to focus by learning to associate the things they hear with a specific meaning.

Listening skills do not develop all by themselves. Accurate and attentive listening takes time and opportunities! Hearing and listening cannot be accelerated.

As parents, you can support the listening experiences of your children
• by taking the time to listen attentively,
• by pointing out interesting and significant auditory events (“Listen to that sound” – great, funny, entirely new, strange...),
• and discussing with your children sounds and noises that mean something to you,
• by deliberately introducing terms as they are known in the world of music, and which help distinguish sounds, such as “loud – quiet”, “bright – dark,” “one – many”, “high – low”,
• by playing the “noise-naming game” with the children (even if though this may at first not be easy): Is it a humming or a buzzing sound? Does it squeak or creak? Is this scraping or scratching?
• by asking people in a different language how animals bark, meow, moo, chirp, etc. in their language, and turning it into a guessing game. Many children will be amazed to learn that other languages use different sounds to describe animal noises.

As parents, you can establish a positive conversational attitude
• by keeping eye contact with your children,
• by turning towards the child when you speak and listen,
• by sitting down with your children when you have a conversation (less talking down and more eye to eye),
• by focusing on the conversation and avoiding distracting movements,
• by indicating agreement and responding to the conversational content of your children by way of short sounds and very short questions (such as: “Ah”, “What was that?”, “Hmm”, “Where?”).

How parents can tell exciting and interesting stories at home

Tamara and Felix love listening to stories. They love snuggling up close to Mummy and/or Daddy on the small couch in the evening, just before going to bed. The lights are dimmed, and they hear the familiar voice of their father or mother in the dusky evening light. The two children listen to the story with rapt attention.

All children love bedtime story-telling rituals. These rituals give children a feeling of security and show them that they can rely on their parents.
Story-telling occasions for different topics:

- Start by thinking up an idea for your story, such as: A visit to the zoo, planning a trip to Grandma and Grandpa, a visit to the circus, a voyage by ship, creating a birthday present, organising an outing with a picnic etc. This way, you have provided a starting point, and the children can develop their own ideas.

- Make a selection of "coloured" words, for example objects that are blue, and then think up a "blue story". You can also mix colours and then tell a multi-coloured story.

- Use comparisons to begin a story, such as x is greater than y ...

- Find rhyming couplets, and expand them into a story.

- Start a story with a string sentence, such as In the city, there are/there are no ..., Animals need ..., When I grow up, I want ato be a ..., As a pirate, I would ...

- Imagine you and your children are flying through the air on a magic carpet, and talk about what the world looks like from above.

- Tell stories for different seasons of the year. Think of the current season on the other side of the globe with your children, and tell a corresponding story.

Narrative styles

- You can also tell stories together with others. Start a storytelling round: A stone, a building block or the like is passed from one sibling to another, and every child can talk about his or her experiences in turn.

- Tell a fairy tale.

- Have a hand puppet act as the storyteller.

- Tell a story that is known in different countries. Compare the variations on the theme.

- If you speak any other languages besides German, tell stories or fairy tales in various languages. This way, the children will get a first-hand impression of the language.

- Tell a story based on pictures.

How parents can practise ad-lib storytelling at home

By listening to the narrator, children perceive accurately how the pitch of the voice changes: speaking louder or softer, every pause, every spoken word, certain alterations in the pronunciation – all of these narrative elements are registered by children. They respond to the rise and fall in suspense, and to funny elements designed to provide amusement and relief from suspense. Children quite literally “hang on to” the narrator’s lips and listen consciously. In their own way, they understand what is said. This way, they learn words, train their ability to focus, and learn to put the individual sections of the story in context. The words of the narrator are transformed into images in the child’s mind (mental images). This fosters children’s imagination, and the words develop their symbolic power. If the children are distracted and their attention wanders, take your time. Interrupt the narrative flow and ask the children about a particular detail in the story. Try to involve the children in the story. Ask them how the story might continue, or how they suppose the hero or heroine feels.
When there are too many noises and other distracting factors in a room, communication becomes quite difficult. Speaking and listening require more of an effort, and misunderstandings are more frequent. Many children also find it harder to learn in the presence of such distracting factors, as they cannot concentrate. Research in the U.S. has shown that children growing up surrounded by high noise levels from the outset (caused by factors such as TV or radio), learn to speak much later and have a smaller vocabulary than children growing up in an environment conducive to listening. Since we cannot simply close our ears, as is the case with our eyes, all sounds have an impact on our soul and body, even if we are not aware of it. Noise is a high stress factor for everyone, even though we may have become used to it.

Parents can increase mutual awareness and understanding by protecting their children from too much noise and establishing a quiet, peaceful atmosphere.

**Story-telling games**

- **Cover a shoe box with coloured paper and fill it with objects that are going to play an important role in a story.** At the beginning of the story, the children can take a few items from the box without looking. First, discuss the objects they have taken out with the children, and then work out their order of appearance in the story. Introduce the objects in your story according to this order.

- **Tell animal stories.** Accompany your story by making animal masks, drawing animals, perhaps cutting them up and reassembling them to invent new funny animal names, and identifying animal sounds.

- **Invent a fruit story.** Arrange the different terms by groups such as fruit or vegetables with your children. Then you can take your children to the weekly farmers’ market, reenact a purchase at the market or identify common fruits and vegetables together blindfolded. Fruits are also ideal to learn adjectives such as soft, hard, sweet, sour, rough, furry, etc. The same applies for learning colours. Concentration and memory skills can be practised in a playful way, e.g. with the Shopping Game: “I put into my trolley a …”, which works along the same lines as the Pack Your Suitcase Game: “I’m going on a trip and I’m taking with me …”.

- **One child says “A” loudly and goes through the alphabet quietly, until another child calls “stop”.** The letter the child stops at determines the name of the protagonist of the story. If you want to make it harder, you can also specify that all nouns (e.g. nose, nutcracker, nightingale) must begin with this letter. This way, an “N” story can for example be created.

- **Using your own artistic name, slip into the role of the famous teller of fairy tales for your children.** For instance, dress up in a cloth for a cape for storytelling and begin and end the story with a specific sound – in other words: “stage” your story.

**What effects can listening, speaking, and reading (aloud) have?**

When there are too many noises and other distracting factors in a room, communication becomes quite difficult. Speaking and listening require more of an effort, and misunderstandings are more frequent. Many children also find it harder to learn in the presence of such distracting factors, as they cannot concentrate. Research in the U.S. has shown that children growing up surrounded by high noise levels from the outset (caused by factors such as TV or radio), learn to speak much later and have a smaller vocabulary than children growing up in an environment conducive to listening. Since we cannot simply close our ears, as is the case with our eyes, all sounds have an impact on our soul and body, even if we are not aware of it. Noise is a high stress factor for everyone, even though we may have become used to it.

Parents can increase mutual awareness and understanding by protecting their children from too much noise and establishing a quiet, peaceful atmosphere.
What effect does reading (aloud) have on children?

Looking at or reading aloud picture books together is instrumental in promoting in particular the development of thought processes in children. Combining reading with dialogue and pointing out and naming the objects shown promotes the linguistic abilities of the child and helps to expand the child’s vocabulary. This ideal situation cannot be replaced by other media such as TV or CDs, as children do not have the opportunity to ask questions or to determine the speed at which information is seen and heard. Talking to other people is the easiest and best way to learn a language. Especially when reading out loud, the reader should consider the special needs of children and establish a connection to the children’s everyday life. This way, the reading situation will be a lively exchange between parents and children. Regularly reading aloud children’s literature can facilitate the smooth transition to the children’s reading on their own.

Regardless of whether you are reading to your children as a father, mother, grandparent, brother or sister, when reading aloud, the reader should ensure that the child understands him or her well. He or she will address the questions asked by the child, and allow the child to look at the book. It is important to actively involve the child in the reading situation, allowing the child to comment, and to encourage the child to take about the story freely. In this way, reading aloud will be a shared experience that promotes a child’s language skills, listening skills, and mental development in a playful way.

Mutual attention and understanding

Children who frequently listen to stories read aloud have an improved ability to focus on what they hear. If you have learned to listen, you will be able to discuss what you hear; your mind is trained, and your vocabulary expanded. Additionally, imagination and creativity are fostered. This, in turn, is a precondition for children’s learning to read on their own.

Suggestions for reading with children

- A moment of tranquility is perfect for reading aloud. Ideally, you should ritualise the reading aloud, i.e. always have it take place at a specific time.
- A quiet, cozy place has a positive effect on the reading situation.
- Children may be impatient. By responding to questions, you can involve the children in the story.
- Children feel appreciated when they are allowed to select the books.
- Stories that are read out again and again tend to become routine. Take turns reading with the children in order to vary the reading rhythm.
- It is best to read from books that also appeal to you. This way, reading aloud will be fun for you as well. If the children insist on reading a book of their choice that does not appeal to you, then you should comply with their wish. But do indicate that you have problems with this book and ask the children why it is specifically this book they want to read.
- Take the time to talk during and after reading.
- Spontaneous reading aloud is fun.

Reading (aloud) project “My dad reads to me”

An offer specifically directed at fathers was initiated jointly by the “hessen foundation – family has a future” and the Reading Foundation, with the support of Hessian Ministry of Social Affairs in the form of the project “My dad reads to me”. Fathers working in companies that participate in the project can download free stories for reading out aloud to their children from the Intranet, and/or print them free of charge, to give their children story-telling moments (www.stiftunglesen.de/mein_papa).
Multilingualism and reading culture
– bilingual storytelling sessions

One fourth of all children born in Germany in 2003 grow up in a multilingual environment (source: Goetheinstitut: Mehrsprachigkeit Sprachen ohne Grenzen, www.goethe.de/ges/spa/prj/sog/ud/de362120.htm). Exposure to multiple languages promotes an open approach to differences in general and other cultures in particular. The first language is the basis for learning other languages. But children can also grow up with several languages simultaneously. It is crucial for language development that each language be associated with a specific person who uses it when speaking to the child in everyday life. Multilingualism is a valuable benefit for children and teaches them about different cultural lifestyles and values. The children are introduced to the customs of other cultures and learn to accept and respect each other.

One exciting option is multi-language reading; this is fun for all members of the family and is at the same time a sign of appreciation of all languages spoken in the family. Today, an increasing range of children’s literature is available as translations. In addition, more and more children’s books come with CDs or DVDs that include translations into other languages. Even if you do not speak the language in question, you can still listen to the story in different languages. Ideally, the native speaker will read aloud in his native language, while another person can read or translate the relevant passage into German.

Quality criteria for children’s literature and media

Which children’s books are good? Which audio media are good? Which criteria can help parents evaluate children’s books and audio media? Which aspects merit particular attention?

Experts distinguish between the artistic, literary, and educational assessment of picture books and audio media. Our focus is on the educational aspect of children’s books and audio plays. In this context, individual attitudes regarding a particular book/audio play an important role. Issues such as whether the parents enjoy the book/radio play affect reading and listening behaviour. What are the reasons for enjoying or rejecting a book? Do parents read books aloud to their children or listen to audio plays together even if they don’t like them? Can children assert their wishes anyway? This may lead to interesting literary discussions and debates about content and format of the media. How do the parent’s personal media experiences affect the selection of children’s media?
Picture books

There are a number of quality criteria that good and especially child-friendly picture books should meet. In addition, personal preferences obviously always play a role. A picture book contains a sequence of informational, entertaining, storytelling images that are often associated with a common theme or a continuous story. Text and images complement each other and are referenced to each other. Especially for younger children, pictures help understand the text. The artistic freedom of the illustrators allows different ways of interpreting images. Realistic depictions help the children to understand the connection between images and words. It is important that content, language, and illustration form a consistent unit, which are either matched or intentionally opposed to each other. The narrative style should use the element of suspense to ensure that the readers or listeners are curious to see how the story continues or ends.

Visual aspects of children's literature (picture books)
Children are not yet set in their artistic tastes. Picture books help children to train their aesthetic perception. It is therefore particularly valuable for children to become acquainted with a wide variety of different artistic styles. The expressive power of the images is important. It is not always the brightest, boldest colours that appeal to children. Illustrations with soft colours or in black and white also stimulate the imagination of children.

Suggestions for selecting picture books:
- Do the pictures arouse curiosity, do they trigger questions?
- Do the pictures prompt closer inspection?
- Are the pictures appealing? (This is largely a matter of personal taste; however, the images should not be scary or repulsive.)
- Are the topics of the text pictured on the same page?
- Is the personality of the characters displayed appropriately? Are their feelings and moods reflected in their facial expressions?
- Do the pictures stimulate conversation?
- Are the sections of the story appropriate for the children's ability to concentrate?

Content aspects of children's literature (picture books)
Children love stories that reflect their own experiences, because this enables them to empathise more readily with the main characters. They develop empathy for the characters, suffer and rejoice with them. They develop solutions to the problems of the protagonists, and transfer their experiences to their own lives.

Suggestions for selecting picture books:
- Can the children identify with one or more of the characters in the story?
- Are the interests, experiences, problems of children addressed?
- Does the content inspire thinking along and ahead?
- Does the book trigger the imagination of the children and leave room for wishes and dreams?
- What images are created in the mind?
- Are there no discriminating or offensive elements (racial, sexual, political, or social)?
- Does the content stimulate discussion and dialogue?
Language aspects of children’s literature (picture books)
Children’s books, i.e. picture books reflect the stage of language development of the young readers or rather listeners. In other words, the language is simple, clear, and structured as appropriate for this age group. The children are not linguistically overchallenged, and they are offered suggestions and ideas to help expand their vocabulary and to use language playfully.

Suggestions for selecting picture books:
- Is the language consistent with the pictures or the characters?
- Is the language contemporary?
- Is the language understandable and appropriate for children?
- Does the language stimulate vocabulary enhancement? Are different types of words used? Are any terms used that need to be explained before reading so as to facilitate listening and allow children to listen carefully?
- Is life-like language used (e.g. by imitation of sounds, comparisons, direct speech)?
- Are length and language appropriate to the absorption capacity of children?

Effects of children’s literature (picture books) on children
Children’s and picture books carry off young readers to a different place, i.e. the children find themselves part of the stories. At the same time, their curiosity for the unknown is piqued. In addition, picture books generate opportunities for storytelling and dialogue, thereby promoting communication between parents and children. At a certain age, girls and boys may begin to develop different interests. This is frequently reflected in a preference for certain topics such as horses or boarding school stories, or rather non-fiction and comic books.

Suggestions for selecting picture books:
- Are the children already familiar with the theme of story, or is it new to them?
- Does the story give the children opportunities to express their own experiences, imagination, and ideas?
- Does the story leave space for the personal development of children?
- Does the story relate to the life and experiences of children?
- What knowledge and experience does the book require the children to have? Are the characters of the story already familiar from previous books? Is the story always set in the same location?
- What feelings are triggered in children (joy, fear, tension, anger, insecurity, joy, fun)?
- Does the story appeal more to girls or boys?

Enhancing vocabulary
Contemporary language
Audio plays

Voices, sounds, noises, and music: Audio plays use these ingredients to create images in the mind. What these “images in my head” look like depends on the (hearing) experiences of an individual. They way a person views the content, language and effect of a story applies to both books and audio plays. However, when selecting audio books and audio plays, you should look at additional criteria: Speaker and voices, as well as noises, music and sounds.

Suggestions for the selection of audio books:

Speakers and voices

While actors and actresses in films are characterised by their expression, their looks, the environment, and their actions, the speaker in a radio play relies on his or her voice alone. Good speakers have a clear pronunciation, vary their speech to make text passages interesting, and emphasise the content appropriately. Their voices should match the characters: Older figures should sound their age. The same applies to young characters. In addition, the voice level of the people should match their moods: A sad child should not sound excited. It is also important that different voices can be distinguished easily. This way, it is easier for children to picture the characters and thereby reinforce their imagination. If the voices are too similar, children will find it difficult to keep track of the story.

Music, sounds and noises

Music, sounds and noises have a tremendous effect on the contents of a story and should ideally be used selectively in an audio play. They can establish different moods, such as joy, fear, sadness, or empathy. Music also creates suspense. It can highlight the mood of a situation, or separate individual scenes from each other. If an audio play contains sounds, they should sound realistic: A plane sounds different from a helicopter. Background noises heard at a particular location should change when the location within the story changes.

You as parents are listening to an audio play with your children:

- Although children enjoy being “all ears” and getting caught up in an audio play on their own, they will be thrilled to have you join them to listen to an audio play together once in a while.
- To make it easier to understand the audio play, it may be helpful to stop the CD frequently or continue it at a later stage.
- You can draw individual scenes or people, or create objects, persons, animals or scenes using everyday objects.
- The content of the story inspires questions, speaking and listening. Discuss the contents with the children, for example the hero or heroine. You can also ask questions such as: What do you think the person looks like? What do you think will happen next? How many voices did you hear? Re-enact scenes, or think up new scenes.
- Audio plays can encourage careful listening. Think of a couple of words before listening to the radio play. Everyone is allowed to pick a word (e.g. buy). When this particular word comes up in the radio play, the person claps his or her hands, and says it aloud.
- It may be interesting to pay attention to the noises in a radio play only, for example to imitate them after listening.

Where can parents find children’s books and audio plays?

Bookstores usually have a large assortment of children’s literature and audio media, but they are also sold in department stores and other stores. A cheaper alternative is to borrow children’s books and audio books from the local library. Here, you sometimes have the opportunity to listen in to audio books to get an idea of the story. Many kindergartens and elementary schools have set up their own small libraries and lend out children’s media to take home. The same is true for family education centres. Another possibility is for children to exchange books and CDs with friends of the family.
There are several ways to maintain contact and provide information to parents. Good educational partnerships between parents, childminders, educational staff in kindergartens and elementary schools are characterised by mutual respect and understanding for each other. This manifests itself, amongst other things, in regular conversations, taking each other seriously, and listening carefully. This way, the transition from the family to the childminder and on to the day-care centre and school is made easier for the children. Such educational partnerships are characterised by the mutual provision of information. There are not only serious reasons to talk to each other, but also relaxed and fun opportunities to exchange ideas. Regular meetings with parents to review a child’s development are important and necessary. But a brief conversation in passing when dropping the child off at the childminder’s, at kindergarten or school are equally important. This shows the child: “I’m interested in the people and surroundings with whom and in which you are going to spend the next few hours”. The joint interest in the child’s well-being always has first priority. Over time, this will establish a relationship of mutual trust between all parties involved.

Under the motto “Opportunity makes the reader and listener”, space and opportunities for reading and listening can be made available in day care facilities and elementary schools. Many day care centres and schools offer reading hours for children. You can offer to participate as a reader or storyteller.

How can parents get involved in festivals
Just as reading and listening are part of kindergarten and elementary school life, they can also be incorporated in festivals at the day care center and at school. You can offer your help as a reading tutor or storyteller at festivals or on the occasion of the nationwide Reading Day.

The kindergarten year and the school year provide many occasions for festivities where reading (aloud) can be integrated. Many day care centres and elementary schools now jointly offer opportunities for parental involvement and exchange.

Educational Partnerships
Relationship of mutual trust

Day care facilities
and elementary school as a place for reading (aloud) and listening
Examples:

• **Apple Festival**
  Some kindergartens and schools celebrate the harvest festival – a variation of this is the Apple Festival. Tell apple stories at the Apple Festival. Draw and write apple picture books with the children, and invent rhymes. You can also make collages from natural materials or create the picture of an apple from crepe paper balls. You as parents can also make apple cake or apple pie with the kindergarten team and/or the teachers together with children, using different apple varieties. Perhaps there is also the possibility to plant an apple tree on the kindergarten or school grounds. This may be accompanied by singing.

• **Halloween Party/Ghost Party**
  Join the crowd at a Halloween Party where the children dress up as ghosts. You, the parents, can make costumes from old sheets, for example. Offer “blood” (cherry juice) and “brown liquor” (children’s cola) as drinks. Read out ghost stories and stage a ghost dance with the children and the kindergarten or school team. This can be accompanied by eerie music or an exciting radio play (e.g. “The Ghost of Saarbrücken Castle” and “The Canterville Ghost”). For the really brave, you can arrange for tests of courage such as “go down into the basement in the dark” or feeling objects in a “case of horrors”.

• **Reading/listening night**
  A reading/listening night can take place both at the day care center and at the elementary school. It can be a special experience for the children starting school soon if the reading out/listening night is held in their future elementary school.

• **Organising a reading/listening quiz**
  Read out a story without mentioning the name of the main character, which must be guessed afterwards. This activity is a fun event at any festival in kindergarten or elementary school. For advanced listeners, you can increase the level of difficulty and organise a reading/listening quiz. Here, children have to answer questions about well-known children’s books and audio plays that were read or listened to together. For the little ones, a children’s book character drawing contest can be held, the results of which are then displayed in an exhibition. Whatever the activity, the emphasis should always be on the fun element.

• **Making a bulletin board with the parents – for the parents**
  With this form of presentation, children can be asked to help. The educational staff in kindergartens and elementary schools write down together with you, the parents, which reading/listening projects they have carried out or planned, collect the lyrics of songs and the texts of stories, pictures and crafts of the children, photos, etc. and put them all together in a collage in newspaper format. This bulletin board can then be presented on the occasion of a media week at the day care centre or school. A modern-day alternative, the newspaper can be transferred to computer and emailed.

• **Reading/listening parents evening**
  Take part in a special parents’ evening “All about children’s media”. Here, you will be presented with information from the kindergarten team and/or the school team on activities focused on listening, language and reading skills throughout the kindergarten and school year. Besides the presentation of work results, performances by the children are also possible. You as parents have the opportunity to obtain information and ask questions about any topics you may be interested in.

• **Children’s Media Exhibition**
  Provide suggestions and tips for regular children’s media exhibitions in kindergarten and in school. If you recommend books or audio plays to the day care centre or school, for instance, they may be integrated. The local library or book store can also give advice and help with the exhibition. The children’s or your own favourite media can be presented, and a thematic exhibition could also be organised.
Selection of books and media

A basic knowledge of picture books and children's books and audio plays as well as the children's audio book market facilitate the selection, use and work with these media.

Tips on how to select the appropriate book are available at libraries, book stores and in reviews such as those published by the Listening Foundation and the Reading Foundation www.stiftunglesen.de/leseempfehlungen.

Where can I find recommendations for audio plays?

Once a month, a newly released CD is recommended by the Listening Foundation. This recommendation can be found free of charge on the Internet at www.stiftung-zuhoeren.de.

This includes suggestions for further playful work with children, and information about the production. On the homepage, there is also an archive with information about previous recommendations (www.stiftung-zuhoeren.de/cd-des-montas/archiv).

Material from Stiftung Zuhören (Listening Foundation):

CD of the month (www.stiftung-zuhören.de/cd-des-montas)
Newsletter (www.stiftung-zuhören.de)

Materials from Stiftung Lesen (Reading Foundation):

Growing with Books & Media
ISBN: 978-3-86613-419-5
Growing up with reading
Reading recommendations online (www.stiftunglesen.de/leseempfehlungen)

My dad reads aloud (www.stiftunglesen.de/mein_papa)

Service

Selection of books and media

A basic knowledge of picture books and children's books and audio plays as well as the children's audio book market facilitate the selection, use and work with these media.

Tips on how to select the appropriate book are available at libraries, book stores and in reviews such as those published by the Listening Foundation and the Reading Foundation www.stiftunglesen.de/leseempfehlungen.

Where can I find recommendations for audio plays?

Once a month, a newly released CD is recommended by the Listening Foundation. This recommendation can be found free of charge on the Internet at www.stiftung-zuhoeren.de.

This includes suggestions for further playful work with children, and information about the production. On the homepage, there is also an archive with information about previous recommendations (www.stiftung-zuhoeren.de/cd-des-montas/archiv).

Material from Stiftung Zuhören (Listening Foundation):

CD of the month (www.stiftung-zuhören.de/cd-des-montas)
Newsletter (www.stiftung-zuhören.de)

Materials from Stiftung Lesen (Reading Foundation):

Growing with Books & Media
ISBN: 978-3-86613-419-5
Growing up with reading
Reading recommendations online (www.stiftunglesen.de/leseempfehlungen)

My dad reads aloud (www.stiftunglesen.de/mein_papa)

www.wirlesenvor.de/der_bundesweite_vorlesetag.html

Hessian Ministry of Social Affairs

Publications:

Our child
Reading guide “Little girls read, so do little boys”

Hessisches Kultusministerium:

www.hessisches-kultusministerium.de
Schule/Grundschule/Förderung/Leseinfo

Hessian Ministry of Social Affairs and the Hessian Ministry of Education:

Education from the outset – Training and education plan for children from 0-10 years in Hessen

Addresses:

Stiftung Zuhören
(Listening Foundation)
c/o Hessischer Rundfunk
Bertramstraße 8
60320 Frankfurt
www.stiftung-zuhoeren.de

Stiftung Lesen
(Reading Foundation)
Römerwall 40
55131 Mainz
www.stiftunglesen.de

Gemeinsame Geschäftsstelle
Bildungs- und Erziehungsplan
Dostojevskaistraße 4
65187 Wiesbaden
www.bep.hessen.de

In the early evening, Tamara and Felix come home. Their mother meets them at the front door and asks what they did in kindergarten, at the day care centre, and at school and at Ahmed’s house. Dinner is a very lively affair, because each family member tells the others what he or she experienced during the day. Felix still has a question on a homework assignment. Tamara talks about the planned summer festival at the day care centre, to which the parents are also invited – they can also take part in the organisation. After dinner with the family, there’s a bedtime story for both children, and they tell their father and mother about some other events of the day that were not discussed at dinner.

All the children play together, have breakfast, listen to a story, and have lunch. In the early afternoon, Tamara is picked up from day care.

The students set up a reading and listening club in the classroom with their teacher. To this end, they first discuss which media are required, and where they are to be stored. At the end they have a story read out to them. After school, Felix goes to Ahmed’s home for lunch and afternoon play.

The group leader welcomes Sofia and Tamara. The other children say hello to Sofia and Tamara. Together they go to the play corner and continue working on the doll house they started to build yesterday.

The elementary school teacher is waiting for the First Grade children. The first lesson is “reading”. All students have brought their favourite book from home.

Sofia’s childminder picks up Tamara. She takes the two girls to the day care center girls.

Felix’s friend Ahmed rings the doorbell and picks him up to go to school.

In the morning before breakfast, Tamara is lying down on the carpet, trying to finish the puzzle she started yesterday. Her brother Felix is not interested, he prefers collecting his football trading cards, which he wants to show to his best friend Ahmed at school. The father calls out from the bathroom, asking whether the two of them are dressed. In the kitchen, the mother is busy with the breakfast dishes, she has to leave and says goodbye to the children. Now the two children must hurry to get ready quickly: The day care centre and elementary school are waiting. As usual, there are discussions about what to wear, and whether the cereal should be mixed with milk or with cocoa. There is much discussion at breakfast.

In the early evening, Tamara and Felix come home. Their mother meets them at the front door and asks what they did in kindergarten, at the day care centre, and at school and at Ahmed’s house. Dinner is a very lively affair, because each family member tells the others what he or she experienced during the day. Felix still has a question on a homework assignment. Tamara talks about the planned summer festival at the day care centre, to which the parents are also invited – they can also take part in the organisation. After dinner with the family, there’s a bedtime story for both children, and they tell their father and mother about some other events of the day that were not discussed at dinner.

Here is an example of a typical day in a family. All family members talk about the things they experienced in the course of the day.

### Daytime

#### Morning

- Tamara is lying down on the carpet, trying to finish the puzzle she started yesterday.
- Felix is collecting his football trading cards.
- The father calls out from the bathroom, asking whether the two children are dressed.

#### Afternoon

- The group leader welcomes Sofia and Tamara.
- The other children say hello to Sofia and Tamara.
- Together they go to the play corner and continue working on the doll house.

#### Evening

- The elementary school teacher is waiting for the First Grade children.
- The first lesson is “reading”.
- All students have brought their favourite book from home.

### Daytime

#### Morning

- Tamara is lying down on the carpet, trying to finish the puzzle she started yesterday.
- Felix is collecting his football trading cards.
- The father calls out from the bathroom, asking whether the two children are dressed.

#### Afternoon

- The group leader welcomes Sofia and Tamara.
- The other children say hello to Sofia and Tamara.
- Together they go to the play corner and continue working on the doll house.

#### Evening

- The elementary school teacher is waiting for the First Grade children.
- The first lesson is “reading”.
- All students have brought their favourite book from home.

Here is an example of a typical day in a family. All family members talk about the things they experienced in the course of the day.

### Daytime

#### Morning

- Tamara is lying down on the carpet, trying to finish the puzzle she started yesterday.
- Felix is collecting his football trading cards.
- The father calls out from the bathroom, asking whether the two children are dressed.

#### Afternoon

- The group leader welcomes Sofia and Tamara.
- The other children say hello to Sofia and Tamara.
- Together they go to the play corner and continue working on the doll house.

#### Evening

- The elementary school teacher is waiting for the First Grade children.
- The first lesson is “reading”.
- All students have brought their favourite book from home.

Here is an example of a typical day in a family. All family members talk about the things they experienced in the course of the day.
Parents listen – speak – read aloud
Striking a harmonious chord
with your children