

## The Power of Family Storytelling

Most of us know how important it is to read to children from an early age, but you may not know how beneficial it is to tell stories to children of all ages – both made up stories and real stories from your own experience. And holiday gatherings are a great time to get started in a way that can promote children’s emotional understanding and strengthen family relationships.

### I. Benefits of telling stories to children

- Builds **language skills** (especially vocabulary and a sense of an organized, coherent narrative)
- Made-up stories promote **creativity and imagination**
- Real stories from your experience help children develop **empathy and understanding**
- Especially for older children and adults, real stories promote **insight into coping strategies and family patterns**

*For example, you may discover that parents or grandparents learned early in life to cope with painful things by bottling up their feelings, and you may decide it will be healthier for you to find a different way. Or you may learn something that helps explain why a family member is so fearful and overprotective. Or you may come to admire the strength of a family member who has risen above a very difficult past. Hearing family stories can help you choose what you want to carry forward and what you want to leave behind, especially when you become a parent yourself.*

### II. Ways to get started with family storytelling

- 1) At a family gathering, ask adults to tell a short story or anecdote about the scariest, happiest, most embarrassing, most exciting (and so on!) thing they remember from their childhood.
- 2) Have kids choose an adult and ask that person to tell them a story about when they were the child’s age. Prompts could include asking about a best friend, favorite teacher, chores they had to do, etc.
- 3) To turn the tables on the suggestion above, have adults ask the kids to tell a story from their life about the same thing.
- 4) Use a sentence completion task to draw out interesting stories. For example, “When I was naughty, my parents would \_\_\_\_\_.”
- 5) For a fun game at a large family gathering, ask each person to write down something others might not know about them. Then have one person read each statement out loud while everyone guesses who wrote it.
- 6) To help develop people’s creativity and imagination, do a chain story, where one person starts the story (offering 2 or 3 sentences) and then the next person picks up where that person left off, and so on.
- 7) Instead of reading a bedtime story to your children every night, sometimes tell them a story instead – maybe making up a fun adventure with your child as the central character. Or ask your child to suggest a topic and make up a short story around that.