Possible Solutions:

- This situation describes a common typical reading time with toddlers. Children of this age are not typically interested in reading a story from beginning to end without discussing the pictures and the story.

- One idea might be to go with it! That is, answer their questions and tell them about the pictures as they look at them. It may take a long time to get through a book in this manner or you may not finish the book at one sitting.

- You may want to direct them back to the book or pictures by asking them questions. For example, you could ask them to name a picture in the book or ask who is wearing “tennis shoes” or “sandals” like the children in the story.

- With toddlers, we don’t worry too much about “getting through” the whole book in a smooth and thorough manner. They are generally too excited about the pictures and ideas or words on each page.

- On the other hand, some toddlers may love to sit and listen to an entire story. “Go with the flow.” Reading is fun and enjoyable and can be an interactive activity with lots of questions and discussion to learn about the topic.

The next time you face a group management situation while reading to a group of young children, try one of these tips. Of course, not every tip will work every time, but if you have a number of guidance ideas available, reading time may be more fun and rewarding for you and the children.

Prepared by Dan Weigel, Sally Martin, Jackie Reilly, JoAnne Kock, and Crystal Swank, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension.

Layout by Colleen Lumpkin.

Guidance Ideas for Reading Books with a Group of Children

Most caregivers know how important it is to share books with children. Not only do books spark wonder and imagination, they help provide foundation skills the children will later need in school. Reading with children helps them:

- get a head start on reading
- do better in school
- like reading
- like school
- develop language skills
- have stronger imaginations
- be better writers
- be better listeners
As much as caregivers love to share books with groups of children, they often find themselves dealing with group management issues. Some children wiggle and others get up and leave the group. Some children sit quietly while others talk all the time. Some children constantly ask questions while others never say a thing. Some children keep their hands to themselves while others can't stop touching other children.

Here are some group management situations that are common in childcare and some ideas for dealing with those situations.

**Common Situations that Can Occur When Reading to a Group of Children**

### # 1: Wandering children

**Situation:**

A classroom of older toddlers and three-year-olds has just moved from playtime to story time. Most of the children have sat down on the rug to hear the teacher read the story. Two children are off wandering around the room, playing with blocks, and not joining the group. What should the teacher do?

**Possible Solutions:**

- The teacher can read the story to those interested and let the others continue to play. Choosing to avoid a power struggle allows for an enjoyable story time for both the teacher and the interested children.

- Child Development Expert Bev Bos says, “Young children get involved and pay attention to what is interesting to them. If

- If the child is not bothering the other children, the teacher may want to let him “do his own thing.” He may not be interested in spiders or may just be tired of sitting still to hear a story. Tom Hunter writes in the May 2000 issue of "Young Children" that sitting still is one reason why circle time is such a problem in many places. He says, “Children aren't being rebellious by moving around. They are not practicing how to flout the authority of the teacher, nor are they growing into a lifetime of irresponsibility. They're just moving and they're moving because they need to. It (movement) makes them smarter and stronger.” He concludes his article with “we now know it's good to fidget.”

### #5: “Teacher, teacher! What’s that!”

**Situation:**

A teacher is reading to a group of 8 toddlers. As she reads, two children keep asking questions about the pictures. As she answers each question, they ask another question. Other toddlers begin to ask questions, too. What can the teacher do?
does this child need from me in order to be successful during a story in a group time?

# 4: Look At The Big Spider!

Situation:

With a group of three toddlers and four young pre-schoolers settled on mats in a semi-circle, the teacher has just started to read a large board book "The Very Busy Spider". When she gets halfway through the book she notices that one of the pre-schoolers is not paying attention to her or the story. He is not bothering any of the other children but is fiddling with his shoes and then starts pulling his shirt over his head and finally starts fidgeting and humming quietly to himself. The teacher realizes that she needs to do something immediately before he starts bothering the other children. How do teachers deal with children with a short attention span? What could this teacher do to alleviate this problem?

Possible Solutions:

• The teacher will want to evaluate the child's attention span. Does this happen all the time, or is this an isolated incident?

• If this is just an isolated incident, the teacher needs to evaluate her reading voice and inflection, and also check to see if the child can see the book. She could make direct eye contact with him and say in a dramatic way "See the big spider?" By directly involving him in the story, his attention will be drawn back to the book. The teacher may take this opportunity to talk about other kinds of spiders, how they build their webs, and ask the child if he has seen any spiders.

we use stories and songs that include children, they will come around. If our goal for our children is social competence, then we need to trust their inherent ability to socialize and their sense of power over and for themselves."

# 2: “Teacher, Teacher I Can’t See!”

Situation:

The teacher is just beginning to read a book to a group of 10 three and four year olds. Several of the children want to sit right next to the teacher. Two others sit right in front of the book, so that the other kids can't see. Soon most of the children are saying, “Teacher, teacher, I can't see.” It seems as though all the children keep crowding closer and closer to the teacher. How can teachers avoid this problem? What can they do when it happens?

Possible Solutions:

• Before story time, the teacher could put pieces of paper on the floor in a circle. She could tell the children that each of them gets a paper pillow or a magic seat to sit on. Then, she could encourage the children to find their own paper pillow and sit on it while she reads the story. As the kids get older, she could put their names on the paper pillows or use different colors and have the children make a game of finding a pillow that matches a color they are wearing. By showing the children where they should sit and having a special place for each child, the teacher may avoid the “Teacher, I can't see” syndrome!”
If the teacher finds himself with several children wanting to sit on his lap or all the children crowding in front of the book, he will probably need to stop for a minute. If the children have moved off their paper pillows, he could have them scurry like mice back to their pillows.

If there is no special place for the children to sit, the teacher could have the children stand, hold hands, make a circle, and sit down. If the teacher moves back one step and holds the book facing toward the children, then all the children should be able to see. It takes practice to tilt the book to one side and then the other, so that all the kids get a chance to look at the pictures. If there is another teacher or aid in the room that can come sit with the group and help the restless children listen to the story, that will help, too.

#3: “Teacher, She’s Bothering Me!”

Situation:

A group of four-year-olds have gathered for group time and the teacher is reading a story. The children are seated comfortably on the rug, but are in a tight bunch in front of the book because they all want to see the pictures. As the teacher reads, one child begins to bother the child next to her. She touches the other child, tries to tickle him, and just seems not interested in the story. Soon the child next to her becomes annoyed and says, “Teacher, she’s bothering me”! How can teachers avoid this problem? What can they do when it happens?

Possible Solutions:

• Before story time, the teacher could create space for children to sit that allows them to see but not be too crowded. This can be done by putting masking tape in a circle on the rug to mark the space and asking children to sit on the edge of the circle. It can also be done using carpet squares or pieces of paper, one for each child to sit on. It’s not as important for children to be sitting in a “circle” as it is for them to have enough space.

• It may also help for the teacher to talk with the group before starting the story. She can ask them if they all have a seat they are comfortable in and if anyone needs to move over a little to have more space. She may also remind children to keep their hands away from their friends during the story. This sometimes includes a short discussion of why it bothers other people when we touch them if they don’t want us to, etc.

• When the touching problem happens during a story, the teacher can offer some guidance to the child by saying, “Please keep your hands away from your friend. He doesn’t want you to touch him.” If this does not help, the teacher may have to move a child to another seat in the group.

• The teacher may want to pay attention to which children sit next to each other. Some children may need to be separated before the story begins. If the teacher has observed that certain children do better with more space or when sitting with another adult, she may ask a child to move to another spot or select a seat for the child prior to starting the story. If a second adult is available, she may ask that the child who tends to touch others sit right next to the other adult.

• If the same child continues to have this problem during the group time, the teacher may want to consider other possible reasons. It helps to ask why you think the child is doing the touching. Is this child trying to get my attention for some reason? Is the child not interested in the story? Is the story too long or not interesting enough for the group? What
- If the teacher finds himself with several children wanting to sit on his lap or all the children crowding in front of the book, he will probably need to stop for a minute. If the children have moved off their paper pillows, he could have them scurry like mice back to their pillows.

- If there is no special place for the children to sit, the teacher could have the children stand, hold hands, make a circle, and sit down. If the teacher moves back one step and holds the book facing toward the children, then all the children should be able to see. It takes practice to tilt the book to one side and then the other, so that all the kids get a chance to look at the pictures. If there is another teacher or aid in the room that can come sit with the group and help the restless children listen to the story, that will help, too.

- It may also help for the teacher to talk with the group before starting the story. She can ask them if they all have a seat they are comfortable in and if anyone needs to move over a little to have more space. She may also remind children to keep their hands away from their friends during the story. This sometimes includes a short discussion of why it bothers other people when we touch them if they don’t want us to, etc.

- When the touching problem happens during a story, the teacher can offer some guidance to the child by saying, “Please keep your hands away from your friend. He doesn’t want you to touch him.” If this does not help, the teacher may have to move a child to another seat in the group.

- The teacher may want to pay attention to which children sit next to each other. Some children may need to be separated before the story begins. If the teacher has observed that certain children do better with more space or when sitting with another adult, she may ask a child to move to another spot or select a seat for the child prior to starting the story. If a second adult is available, she may ask that the child who tends to touch others sit right next to the other adult.

- If the same child continues to have this problem during the group time, the teacher may want to consider other possible reasons. It helps to ask why you think the child is doing the touching. Is this child trying to get my attention for some reason? Is the child not interested in the story? Is the story too long or not interesting enough for the group? What

#3: “Teacher, She’s Bothering Me!”

Situation:

A group of four-year-olds have gathered for group time and the teacher is reading a story. The children are seated comfortably on the rug, but are in a tight bunch in front of the book because they all want to see the pictures. As the teacher reads, one child begins to bother the child next to her. She touches the other child, tries to tickle him, and just seems not interested in the story. Soon the child next to her becomes annoyed and says, “Teacher, she’s bothering me!” How can teachers avoid this problem? What can they do when it happens?

Possible Solutions:

- Before story time, the teacher could create space for children to sit that allows them to see but not be too crowded. This can be done by putting masking tape in a circle on the rug to mark the space and asking children to sit on the edge of the circle. It can also be done using carpet squares or pieces of paper, one for each child to sit on. It’s not as important for children to be sitting in a “circle” as it is for them to have enough space.

- It may also help for the teacher to talk with the group before starting the story. She can ask them if they all have a seat they are comfortable in and if anyone needs to move over a little to have more space. She may also remind children to keep their hands away from their friends during the story. This sometimes includes a short discussion of why it bothers other people when we touch them if they don’t want us to, etc.

- When the touching problem happens during a story, the teacher can offer some guidance to the child by saying, “Please keep your hands away from your friend. He doesn’t want you to touch him.” If this does not help, the teacher may have to move a child to another seat in the group.

- The teacher may want to pay attention to which children sit next to each other. Some children may need to be separated before the story begins. If the teacher has observed that certain children do better with more space or when sitting with another adult, she may ask a child to move to another spot or select a seat for the child prior to starting the story. If a second adult is available, she may ask that the child who tends to touch others sit right next to the other adult.

- If the same child continues to have this problem during the group time, the teacher may want to consider other possible reasons. It helps to ask why you think the child is doing the touching. Is this child trying to get my attention for some reason? Is the child not interested in the story? Is the story too long or not interesting enough for the group? What
# 4: Look At The Big Spider!

**Situation:**

With a group of three toddlers and four young pre-schoolers settled on mats in a semi-circle, the teacher has just started to read a large board book "The Very Busy Spider". When she gets halfway through the book she notices that one of the pre-schoolers is not paying attention to her or the story. He is not bothering any of the other children but is fiddling with his shoes and then starts pulling his shirt over his head and finally starts fidgeting and humming quietly to himself. The teacher realizes that she needs to do something immediately before he starts bothering the other children. How do teachers deal with children with a short attention span? What could this teacher do to alleviate this problem?

**Possible Solutions:**

- The teacher will want to evaluate the child's attention span. Does this happen all the time, or is this an isolated incident?

- If this is just an isolated incident, the teacher needs to evaluate her reading voice and inflection, and also check to see if the child can see the book. She could make direct eye contact with him and say in a dramatic way "See the big spider?" By directly involving him in the story, his attention will be drawn back to the book. The teacher may take this opportunity to talk about other kinds of spiders, how they build their webs, and ask the child if he has seen any spiders.

# 2: “Teacher, Teacher I Can’t See!”

**Situation:**

The teacher is just beginning to read a book to a group of 10 three and four year olds. Several of the children want to sit right next to the teacher. Two others sit right in front of the book, so that the other kids can’t see. Soon most of the children are saying, “Teacher, teacher, I can’t see.” It seems as though all the children keep crowding closer and closer to the teacher. How can teachers avoid this problem? What can they do when it happens?

**Possible Solutions:**

- Before story time, the teacher could put pieces of paper on the floor in a circle. She could tell the children that each of them gets a paper pillow or a magic seat to sit on. Then, she could encourage the children to find their own paper pillow and sit on it while she reads the story. As the kids get older, she could put their names on the paper pillows or use different colors and have the children make a game of finding a pillow that matches a color they are wearing. By showing the children where they should sit and having a special place for each child, the teacher may avoid the “Teacher, I can’t see” syndrome!
As much as caregivers love to share books with groups of children, they often find themselves dealing with group management issues. Some children wiggle and others get up and leave the group. Some children sit quietly while others talk all the time. Some children constantly ask questions while others never say a thing. Some children keep their hands to themselves while others can't stop touching other children. Here are some group management situations that are common in childcare and some ideas for dealing with those situations.

Common Situations that Can Occur When Reading to a Group of Children

# 1: Wandering children

Situation:

A classroom of older toddlers and three-year-olds has just moved from playtime to story time. Most of the children have sat down on the rug to hear the teacher read the story. Two children are off wandering around the room, playing with blocks, and not joining the group. What should the teacher do?

Possible Solutions:

• The teacher can read the story to those interested and let the others continue to play. Choosing to avoid a power struggle allows for an enjoyable story time for both the teacher and the interested children.

• Child Development Expert Bev Bos says, “Young children get involved and pay attention to what is interesting to them. If

• If the child is not bothering the other children, the teacher may want to let him “do his own thing.” He may not be interested in spiders or may just be tired of sitting still to hear a story. Tom Hunter writes in the May 2000 issue of "Young Children" that sitting still is one reason why circle time is such a problem in many places. He says, "Children aren't being rebellious by moving around. They are not practicing how to flout the authority of the teacher, nor are they growing into a lifetime of irresponsibility. They're just moving and they're moving because they need to. It (movement) makes them smarter and stronger.” He concludes his article with “we now know it's good to fidget.”

#5: “Teacher, teacher! What's that!”

Situation:

A teacher is reading to a group of 8 toddlers. As she reads, two children keep asking questions about the pictures. As she answers each question, they ask another question. Other toddlers begin to ask questions, too. What can the teacher do?
Possible Solutions:

- This situation describes a common typical reading time with toddlers. Children of this age are not typically interested in reading a story from beginning to end without discussing the pictures and the story.

- One idea might be to go with it! That is, answer their questions and tell them about the pictures as they look at them. It may take a long time to get through a book in this manner or you may not finish the book at one sitting.

- You may want to direct them back to the book or pictures by asking them questions. For example, you could ask them to name a picture in the book or ask who is wearing “tennis shoes” or “sandals” like the children in the story.

- With toddlers, we don’t worry too much about “getting through” the whole book in a smooth and thorough manner. They are generally too excited about the pictures and ideas or words on each page.

- On the other hand, some toddlers may love to sit and listen to an entire story. “Go with the flow.” Reading is fun and enjoyable and can be an interactive activity with lots of questions and discussion to learn about the topic.

The next time you face a group management situation while reading to a group of young children, try one of these tips. Of course, not every tip will work every time, but if you have a number of guidance ideas available, reading time may be more fun and rewarding for you and the children.

Prepared by Dan Weigel, Sally Martin, Jackie Reilly, JoAnne Kock, and Crystal Swank, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension.
Layout by Colleen Lumpkin.

Guidance Ideas for Reading Books with a Group of Children

Most caregivers know how important it is to share books with children. Not only do books spark wonder and imagination, they help provide foundation skills the children will later need in school. Reading with children helps them:

- get a head start on reading
- do better in school
- like reading
- like school
- develop language skills
- have stronger imaginations
- be better writers
- be better listeners