The Gunniwolf by Wilhelmina Harper

Higher! Higher! by Leslie Patricelli

The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle

Your voice, or any recording of the song, “Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes”

**Narrative Skills:**

**Materials and Books Needed**

How can you get your baby started on the path to good narrative skills? Talk, talk, talk! Hearing a language spoken fluently is the best way for children to learn to talk themselves. With very young children you can have a “conversation” over a book. Point to a picture, ask what it is, pause for a brief period, then describe the item. For example, “What’s this? Oh yummy, it’s a bright yellow banana! You love bananas, don’t you? They’re so squishy and sweet – just perfect for my sweet little baby with no teeth!)

Talking or singing songs about body parts is also a great activity for Baby. Try the classic “Head, Shoulders, Knees and or Toes.” (Your friendly local librarian can help you find a recording if you aren’t familiar with it.) Don’t worry about your vocal styling – babies don’t mind if you can’t carry a tune. Or, try this fun finger play with no singing required.

Tommy Thumbs Up (wiggle your thumbs pointing up)

Tommy Thumbs down (wiggle thumbs pointing down)

Tommy thumb is dancing all around the town (“dance” thumbs in air)

Dance them on your shoulders (“dance” thumbs on baby’s shoulders)

Dance them on your head (“dance” thumbs on baby’s head)

Dance them on your knees (“dance” thumbs on baby’s knees)

And tuck them into bed (tuck thumbs inside fists)

**Narrative Skills Activities: Babies**

Now that your toddler is talking a bit, playing with narrative skills gets even easier. Talk about your day. Recapping your child’s day from the time they got up in the morning until right before they go to sleep is a great bedtime story. What’s more, your child already knows the story, so he can contribute. If you’ve got writer’s block, here’s an easy way to start, “Wow, you had a really big day, huh? First you woke up kind of early, and had your favorite breakfast – blueberry pancakes! Then you got dressed and…”

Or use nature as your muse. Pick a book with a sequence based in the natural world, like The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle, and ask your child what she thinks is going to happen. Wordless or nearly wordless books are also great tools for developing narrative skills. Check out Higher! Higher! by Leslie Patricelli and have your child tell you what’s going on in the pictures.

**Narrative Skills Activities: Toddlers**

Most preschoolers are more than willing to work on narrative skills, because they love to talk and tell stories. So go with that – ask your child lots of questions that can’t be answered by yes or no. When your child answers, ask for more details. If he spent the day with Grandma, ask what he did. If he says they took a walk to the park, ask what they did there. If he says they fed the ducks, ask what they fed them. Or ask if it was cold outside, what he wore, etc. This can be as much fun for you as it is for your child!

Another great way to help your preschooler develop narrative skills is telling the same story multiple ways. For example, read The Gunniwolf by Wilhelmina Harper – it’s got a simple repetitive plot that’s easy for both kids and grownups to remember. Once you’re comfortable with the story, try telling it without the book. This is a great one for storytelling because you can add in motions for the flower picking and running. Then, make simple stick puppets of a wolf, a little girl, and a mom and let your little one use them to tell you the story. You’ll be surprised at how well they do!

**Narrative Skills Activities: Preschoolers**