

Lancaster County Reach Out and Read Coalition Volunteer Handbook



Volunteer Responsibilities

- **Always introduce yourself to parents and children.** Wear the volunteer tag provided by the clinic.
- **Designate a reading space.** You may want to place small chairs in a circle so children can join in and listen to the books.
- **Be enthusiastic about reading.** Show parents and children how much fun it can be to share a book together! Read with gusto to grab the child's attention. Vary your voice and tone to create drama.
- **Be patient!** At times there will be very few children in the waiting room, or the children may not be interested in reading at that moment. A pediatric waiting room can often be an unpredictable place, but rest assured, your next visit could be very busy.
- **Encourage participation from the children.** Some techniques include asking questions, letting children choose between two books, having them point to pictures, or helping you turn pages. If they are familiar with your book, leave out a word and ask them to fill it in.
- **Talk to children at their eye level.** Sit in a low chair or on the floor while you are reading, this makes it more comfortable for children to approach you.
- **Bring a book that you are comfortable with.** If you have a favorite age-appropriate book you would like to share, bring it with you!

A Sample Day at the Clinic

- Arrive at the clinic introduce yourself to the staff and sign in the ROR Volunteer Book. Put on a volunteer name tag.
- Gather what you will need for your reading time. This may include things such as books, bookmarks, or stickers.
- Go to the waiting room and designate an area to situate yourself for reading. Perhaps choose a quiet corner where it will be easy for a group of children to gather around you. If the TV is on, you may want to turn it down to limit distractions while you are reading.
- You may decide to start by inviting one child to listen to a story. If there are many children in the waiting room, they will usually join in. Or, you may be more comfortable announcing to the group that you are going to read a story and invite them all to listen. Over time, you will develop your own style for initiating read-aloud sessions.
- Remember that each time you volunteer, the waiting room atmosphere will differ. It may be quiet, noisy, empty, or crowded. If it is very busy, remember to take a break. If it is slow you may ask the Coordinator what other tasks you could help with or bring a book for yourself.
- Remember, children and parents can be stressed. Many children are sick or scared. Many parents are overwhelmed with life crises. Families may take a minute to warm up, but most will welcome a book or story.
- When your time is almost over, let the children and parents know that you will read one more book and then it will be time for you to say goodbye. Encourage them to continue looking at books after you leave. There may be another volunteer arriving after you. If you are aware of this, let them know.
- Be sure to straighten up the reading area before you leave. Put books back on shelves or in bookcases. Return any extra supplies to where they are stored.
- Let the Program Coordinator or front desk staff know that you are leaving. Remember to sign out in the volunteer book with the time that you left. This helps Coordinators track your hours. At this time, you also may want to confirm when you will be back for your next shift.

Dialogic Reading

During your volunteer shifts, *how* you read books in the waiting room is an important consideration. Children respond best when they are involved in the story and their participation is encouraged. Children sometimes learn more from books when they are actively involved. There is a technique for reading aloud called "dialogic reading," which was originated by Dr. Grover Whitehurst. This means that instead of simply you reading and the child listening, you let the child be actively involved in telling the story.

There are several ways to accomplish this task

- **Ask the child questions** about the pictures and the story. For example, if there is a picture of a car in the book you could point to it and ask, "What's that?" Or, a more open-ended question for older children such as "Where do you think they are going in the car?" Questions containing "who," "what," "where," "when," "why" and "how" can be useful in teaching children new things.
- **Leave words out** of a sentence and let children fill them in. For example, "The cat in the _____?" Children love to guess what the next word is. This approach is particularly effective if the child is already familiar with the book.
- **Ask open-ended questions** about the pictures in the story. This allows children to be creative and tell their own story about the pictures they see.
- Older children can be asked to **recall what happened** after hearing a story. For example, after hearing a book about babies, ask "What did the baby like to eat?" or, "What made the baby cry?"
- **Relate something in the book** to what is happening around the child in his or her daily life. Although you will not know these children, you can think of ways to do this by using general life events. For example, "This little girl in the story ate pancakes for breakfast. Did you eat breakfast today? What do you like to eat?"

Read-aloud Selections

- When choosing which books to read during your read-aloud sessions, there are several things to consider. The first thing to think about is the population that the clinic serves. What are the various racial and ethnic groups that families represent? Keep this diversity in mind when looking through books. Try to choose some stories and illustrations that reflect the ethnicity of the children you will be reading to.
- Keep in mind that books can be both windows and mirrors for children. Dr. William Teale talks about the "Windows and Mirrors Theory" when considering book selections for young children. Simply put, this theory stresses the importance of exposing children to stories and images that "mirror" their own experiences, at the same time that they are shown "windows" into experiences different from their own.
- Another thing to consider is what languages the children and parents speak. If you have books in these languages available, share them with the children and parents. Even if you are not comfortable reading in another language, encourage parents to participate, or simply talk about the illustrations. There are many different books available in the Reach Out and Read Catalog in various languages. If necessary, you may suggest to the Program Coordinator that some are ordered to keep on hand.
- Also, consider the ages of the children present in the waiting room. Choose board books with few words and bold pictures for very young children. For toddlers, books with textures, animals, familiar routines, and simple stories encourage lots of participation. For preschoolers, choose books with good stories, alphabet and counting books, or rhymes.
- Another great idea when reading to a group is to use "Big Books." These are oversized books that have large print and illustrations. They are perfect for engaging children in the reading process. Some familiar titles are available in this format at bookstores.

What Children Like in Books

- Infants 6-12 Months Like:
 - Board books with photos of babies
 - Brightly colored board books to touch
 - Books with pictures of familiar objects—balls, bottles
 - Small books sized for small hands
- Younger Toddlers 12-24 Months Like:
 - Sturdy board books they can handle and carry
 - Books with photos and pictures of children doing familiar things—sleeping, eating, playing
 - Goodnight books for bedtime
 - Books about saying hello and goodbye
 - Books with only a few words on the page
 - Books with simple rhymes or predictable text
- Older Toddlers 24-36 Months Like:
 - Books with board pages--but also books with paper pages
 - Silly and funny books
 - Rhymes, rhythms, repetitious text – books they can learn by heart
 - Books about children and families
 - Books about making friends
 - Books about food
 - Books about animals
 - Books about trucks
 - Word books
- Pre-Schoolers 3-5 Years Like:
 - Books that tell stories
 - Books about kids that look like them and live like them, but also books about different places and different ways of living
 - Books about going to school, books about making friends
 - Books with simple text they can memorize
 - Counting books, alphabet books, vocabulary books

Tips

- Make a general announcement that you are about to start reading—or else start reading a story and see who comes to listen.
- Ask a child to choose the book to be read aloud.
- Invite parents with babies or shy children to look at books themselves or just listen to story from their seats rather than joining the group.
- Use different voice, make the sounds in the book (i.e. train sounds, moo like a cow, etc.)
- Use body language (i.e., pretend to play a musical instrument, wave goodbye, pretend to cry, etc.)
- Ask the children questions about the pictures (what is this, where are the red balloons, what do you think that monkey is trying to do, etc.)
- Make it clear that it's fine with you if young children don't listen to the entire story, if they leave the group to check back with a parent, or look at other books.
- Consider what languages the children and parents speak. If you have books in these languages available, share them with the children and parents
- Older children may want to help read the story.
- Volunteers are NOT teaching reading, but making books and reading fun.
- Be flexible and do what is most comfortable for you—enjoy yourself.