



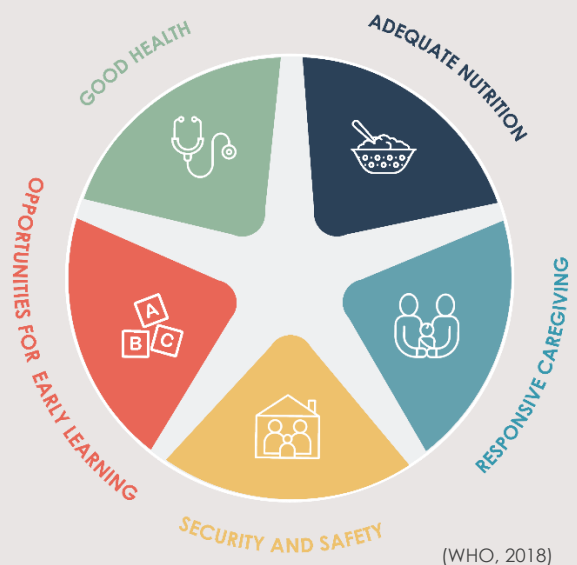
HOW TO...

support early learning through talk & play

Sikunye seeks to equip and support churches to care for families in the First Thousand Days (FTD). This reflection is part of a range of workshops hosted by Sikunye, aimed at equipping churches to understand the nurturing care framework.

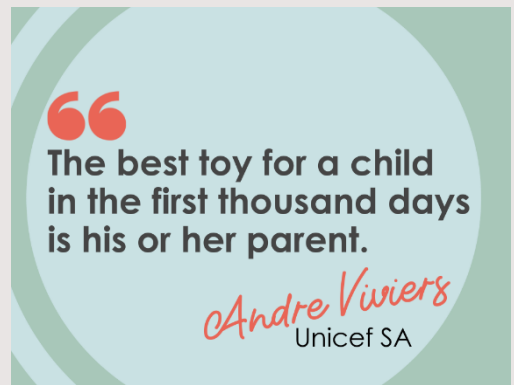
what is nurturing care?

Nurturing care is what all children need to thrive. It is defined as a stable environment that is sensitive to children's health and nutritional needs, and that provides protection from harm, opportunities for early learning, and interactions that are responsive, emotionally supportive, and developmentally stimulating. These environments offer acceptance and a sense of belonging and connection demonstrated through an active and constant relationship with the child or adolescent



building brains through the power of play

Babies are learning all the time! And did you know that parents and caregivers have the superpower of PLAY? Small, everyday actions can build brains in young children. **What can you do to encourage play in the First Thousand days?** All positive playful interactions between baby and parent/caregivers are vitally important in the early years of a child's life. These shared moments build the relationship or



bond between the baby and parent, they build the child's brains and are essential to stimulate the child's healthy development.

The question for FTD-friendly churches is, **'how can we encourage our moms & dads to have positive enjoyable everyday moments with their young child?'** As churches, you have a wonderful opportunity to foster playful interactions in the home.

here are some ideas of what you can do to encourage and support play and early learning:

- **Speak up** and talk about the importance of play. This will create awareness in your church, in your parents' groups and the community around you. **Talk about the importance of why** spending time with young children is so essential. And time that isn't just for feeding, changing, and cleaning.
- **Create opportunities and safe spaces** in moms' groups, on Sundays and in other gathering to encourage moms and dads to play peek-a-boo, sing a song, talk through a picture book.

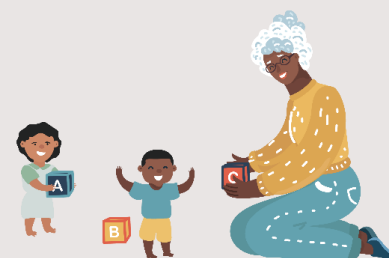
Play = learning = play

Play = physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and creative skills

Play = school readiness

Play = a positive adult – baby relationship

Play = lots of back-and-forth interactions between adult – baby



- **Equip parents** through by running Antenatal and postnatal classes like **Flourish**, and using other parenting events at your church will build the capacity of your parents. It is extremely important to equip young parents with the knowledge that positive engagements like making lots of eye contact, cooing, singing, cuddling, following the cues of baby, reading, talking, gazing, mirroring, pointing – right from the very start of life is critical to help their children thrive.
- **Share quality information and helpful tips** around play with practical ideas through WhatsApp groups or parent groups or on Sundays. You can share one new idea a week with parents to do together. Here are some suggested websites for practical ideas to share with parents to use:
 - **Vroom app** has practical activities that are specific to the age of baby - <https://www.vroom.org/>
 - **Do More - Parenting resources** hub - <https://domore.org.za/parenting-resources/>
 - **Learning through Play** - <https://learningthroughplay.com/>
 - **The power of play** - <https://www.unicef.org/southafrica/power-play>

- **Affirm and encourage** moms and dads when you see them interacting with their baby in a playful way. Highlight what they did well and encourage them to keep playing and responding to babies' cues. *"Well done mom! I love seeing you making eye contact and smiling with your baby. You are doing such a great job!"*
- **Avoid shaming** or blaming parents. Rather find ways to encourage parents to find **5 minutes** a day to be with their young child and to be intentional around shared moments and play.
- **Relax and have fun with it.** Encourage parents to enjoy these positive moments. There isn't a right or wrong way to do it. Encourage parents to use the everyday normal things they do around the house and to use them to engage with baby. Making lots of eye contact, smile, talk and follow babies' cues when changing nappy, bath time and dressing baby.



As adults, let's remember to have fun, and enjoy the good sense of humour God has given us. God has created us with a playfulness to enjoy life, to have fun with our family, friends and especially our children – even our young babies.

The more we all PLAY the easier it gets. We don't need fancy toys, all baby needs are a loving, engaged, caring adult. **Parents are the best toy! By far!**

Watch these video around the topic of play

Baby talk for Dads by Unicef

Baby talk may sound silly, but it actually helps develop the brain.



'Peek-a-boo' can really change the world. How every child can thrive by five. Inspiring Ted Talk by 7-year-old, Molly Wright.



Building brains through the power of play

The Sikunye Gathering

Watch the recording of this inspiring event



building brains through talk - making every word count – right from the start of life

Language development starts at the beginning of life, during pregnancy and from birth all the way through the early years. Too often we think that learning to read and write only starts in formal education settings, but it is quite the opposite. A range of research shows that “children who have lacked opportunities to build a strong language foundation between birth and six years will struggle to keep up.”¹

Critically, the number of words children hear matters. The more words they are exposed to early in life, the better their vocabulary and reading comprehension is at school. We need to encourage and create language-rich environments and homes for our children.

Babies and toddlers learn language best when the significant adult in their life is responsive, making lots of eye contact, and engage with their young child through reading, telling stories, singing songs, babbling, coo-ing, vocalising, talking about things around them, making sounds, and taking their young baby to the library. These loving, everyday interactions build the baby's brain and lay strong foundations for future reading and learning in life. This is language-rich environment is referred to in short as **TALK**. [Read this blog](#) to learn more about why creating a language- rich environment is so important for babies.

here are some ideas of what you can do to encourage a language -rich environment in the first thousand days:

We need to “**celebrate the role of parents as the first teachers.**” There are very few opportunities for parents and caregivers to learn how best to support their children's learning at home right from pregnancy. ¹

Did you know: The brain architecture is peaking in its language development at **6months of age!**



Did you know that parents and primary caregivers are the child's first teachers!

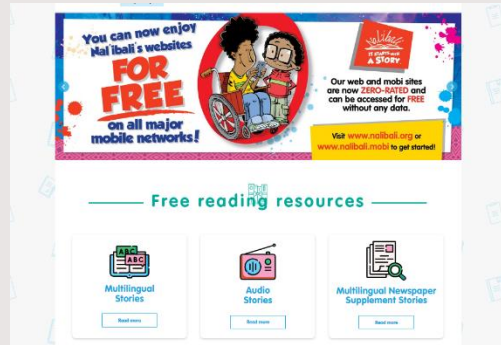
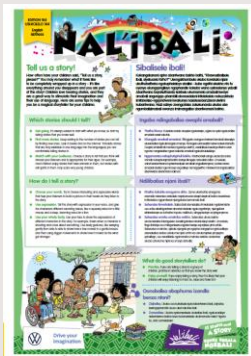


as a church, you can:

- **Speak up and raise awareness** about the importance of TALK in the first thousand days. Help parents to understand and value their role in building their baby's brain.
- **Create opportunities to equip parents** with practical information that will grow their skills and confidence to regularly read and talk to their children.
- **Create opportunities and safe spaces** in moms' groups, on Sundays and in other gathering to encourage moms and dads to play peek-a-boo, sing a song, talk through a picture book.
- **Equip parents** through running or host trainings with one of the below organisations. It is extremely important to equip young parents with the knowledge that positive engagements like making lots of eye contact, cooing, singing, cuddling, following the cues of baby, reading, talking, gazing, mirroring, pointing – right from the very start of life is critical to help their children thrive.
- **Start reading group** in your church or **create a book corner** where people can donate books or share books or go to the library together.
- **Affirm and encourage** moms and dads when you see them TALKing with their baby. Highlight what they did well and encourage them to keep TALKing and responding to babies' cues. "Well done mom! I love seeing you making eye contact and talking with your baby. You are doing such a great job!"
- **Collaborate and refer** to local organizations that are equipping parents to read like [Word Works](#), [Nal'ibali](#), [Book Dash](#), [Mikhulu Trust](#), Local Library, and [SmartStart](#).
- **Share quality information and helpful tips**, online resources, free digital books, and more to equip and help parents as they practice TALK at home. Consider using WhatsApp groups or parent groups or on Sundays. You can share one new idea a week. Below are some suggested websites for practical ideas to share.



Pick up the **Nal'ibali Supplement** - available at your nearest **Post Office** in all South African languages



Visit the **Nal'ibali data free website** <https://nalibali.org/> To download stories and much more

Wordworks: Every Word Counts programme resources



Talk and Listen leaflet – [click here](#)
Play and Learn leaflet available in English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, and Zulu – [click here](#)



Start a 'Every Word Counts' parent workshop group



An example of what you can share with parents:

Read Early and Read Often!

Find a regular time in your daily routine read with your baby. To access free books and much more, here are a range of wonderful resources to help you to read and talk with your children and many are on data-free websites or mobi apps:



- [Book Dash](#)
- [Nal'ibali](#)
- [WordWorks](#) Play & Learn Activities
- [African Storybooks](#)
- [Smartstart](#) parent space
- [Thanda](#)
- [Mikhulu Trust](#) wordless picture books
- [Local Library](#) 1st 1000 stories before school

for more ideas go to [Do More Foundation Parenting Resources](#) or [Moya Messenger](#) or [Vroom app](#) as practical activities that are specific to the age of baby.

Here are some [tips for reading with young children](#). These tips from [Book Dash](#) are available in [all 11 languages](#) to share with parents.



The image shows a page from 'Book Dash' titled 'Tips for reading with young children'. The page is in English and includes the following content:

- How do you read with your child?**
 - ✓ You don't have to be a good reader to read with your child just do it!
 - ✓ Choose the same time each day to read with your child (e.g. bedtime). Snuggle up close and enjoy the experience.
 - ✓ Make it fun: use different voices and get your child to participate.
 - ✓ Let your child be the leader, and you follow: talk about the pictures that interest your child and ask questions.
 - ✓ It's never too early to start reading with a child, so you can read with your baby too.
- Why should you read with your child?**
 - ✓ Reading is a wonderful tool to help your young child's brain develop and get ready for school. Children who often read books with their parents perform well at school.
 - ✓ Reading helps your child build strong relationships with you and their friends.
 - ✓ A regular bedtime routine, including reading a book, helps children sleep better.

At the bottom, there is a link: 'Find more free books at bookdash.org/books'.

Watch these video around the topic of talk

Baby talk master class with Dr. Kalashnikova by Unicef



Baby talking to his dad.



Make every word count – right from the start of life

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references:

¹ S. O'Carroll, & R. Hickman (May 2012). *Narrowing the literacy gap: Making a case for the importance of early language and literacy development in South Africa*. Hands-on, Learning Brief 17. The DG Murray Trust. Retrieved: <https://dgmt.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Wordworks.pdf>

¹ S. O'Carroll. (April 2022). *Emergent Language and Literacy*. Thrive by five index, Action Brief. Innovation Edge Retrieved: <https://www.thrivebyfive.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/ActionBriefEmergentLanguageAndLiteracy.pdf>