

5. Stories for your family

Document 5 of 5



Picture made with AI image generation (OpenAI)

Your selected stories, with their notes and sources.

3D · Divert · Discomfort → Delight

HDI rests on one simple idea: 3D. Three words, easy to keep in mind on a hard day.

3D is the umbrella over every model, and it runs through each one. 3D is also a way back to three dimensions: up and down, forward and back, left and right. Smells, sounds, colours and the freedom of open space. The screen is flat; the world your body and senses know best is not.

Divert. When the pull toward the screen comes, willpower alone rarely wins. Turn toward something that does you more good. The things you can turn to are your copers.

Discomfort. The first days of any change feel awkward. That is not a sign it is failing. What carries you through are your energizers: they give you the energy to keep going.

Delight. Repeat the new step, and what took effort becomes familiar, then something you enjoy and choose for yourself.

Each model below is three words: two ways, and where they lead. Remember the letter, and the words come back. Each one is grounded in published research on coping and motivation.

Energizers

Energizers give you the energy to get through the Discomfort.

3M · Meaning · Momentum → Mastery
Meaning — know why it matters to you; Momentum — keep going, and start again kindly after a slip; Mastery — setbacks stop deciding for you

3E · Environment · Energize → Empower
Environment — arrange your space so the good choice is the easy one; Energize — act first; the feeling follows; Empower — the change becomes yours

Copers

Copers are what you can Divert to instead of the screen.

3O · Others · Outdoors → Outstanding
Others — people, face to face; Outdoors — time outside, in nature; Outstanding — feeling fully alive

3A · Awe · Alertness → Achievement
Awe — something bigger than you; Alertness — attention out, here and now; Achievement — doing something that means something to you

3B · Basics · Body → Balance
Basics — sleep, meals and rest without a screen; Body — move in your free time; Balance — a body that can switch off and recover

3S · Separation · Solitude → Success
Separation — distance from the phone; Solitude — time alone, without distraction; Success — you steer your day again

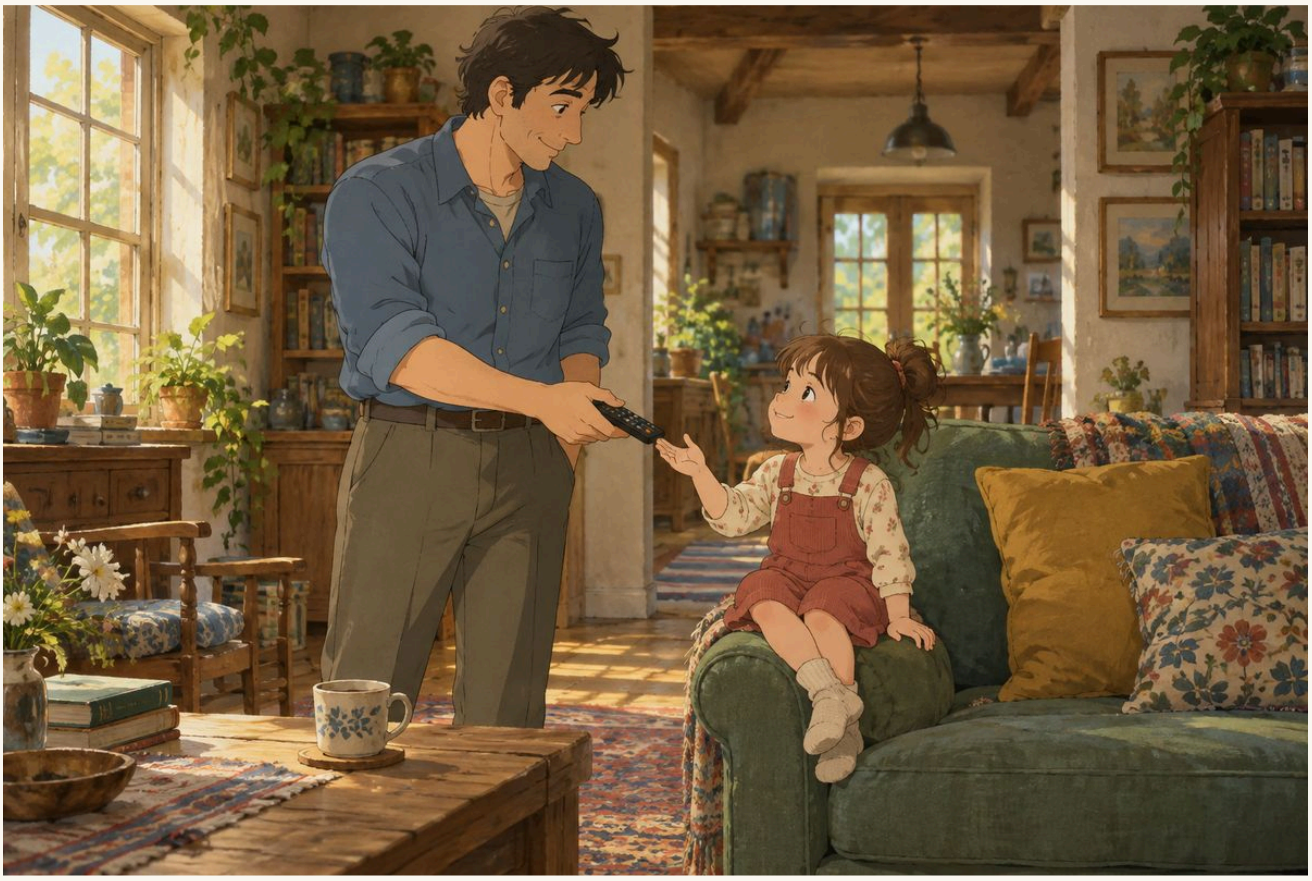
3F · Filter · Focus → Flow
Filter — let in only what matters; Focus — one task at a time; Flow — deep absorption in something worth doing

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The Snail or the Lighthouse

Helps with: What reaches your child

Try 1 in the document “Six weeks, one step at a time” comes from this story.



Maja, this one reached you through what is on, and who it suits. Here is a story about Marko, whose Saturday mornings start with a long menu of bright videos.

Marko mends streetcars. All week he is at the depot by the river, with his arms in the brakes of the Four. On Saturdays Ema's mother sells flowers at the market. So Saturday mornings belong to Marko and Ema. Ema is four. Marko moved in the winter before last, and he is still learning how the house works.

The television is one of the things he is learning. Ema knows its menu better than he does. She holds the remote in both hands and goes along the rows. The rows are full of bright, fast videos, and every little picture has a face on it with its mouth open. Choosing is a big part of the morning. She picks one, and then another, and then the first one again. Marko makes the coffee and lets her. It was her television before he came, and he did not come to take anybody's remote away.

This Saturday he stands behind the sofa and watches the choosing. Each time Ema stops on a picture, it starts to play by itself, loudly, and then she moves on. He could not say who put any of it at the front of the row. It was not Ema, and it was not him.

He finds this interesting. At the depot nothing moves unless somebody has decided it should.

While Ema is at the table with her toast, he takes the remote. Far past the bright rows there is a row of programmes made for very small children. He finds a snail who carries letters round a garden, slowly. He finds a lighthouse with a keeper and a cat, and a sea that mostly stays where it is. He watches a little of each, and his coffee goes cold.

Ema comes back with jam on one hand.

"The snail or the lighthouse?" Marko asks. He holds the remote so that both pictures are on the screen.

Ema looks at the snail. She looks at the lighthouse. Then she points past both of them, at the bright row.

"That one."

"The snail or the lighthouse, today."

"No."

"No to both?"

"No to both."

She says it again, louder, with the jam hand in the air. Marko does not argue. He stands there holding the remote where it is, the way he holds a brake shoe while somebody else finds the bolt.

In the end she takes the remote and presses the lighthouse.

"Because of the cat," she says. "Only because of the cat."

She sits on the arm of the sofa with her knees up, the way she sits for everything, and the sea does not do very much.

Marko drinks the cold coffee. He does not know whether the lighthouse is better than the bright row. He does know a little about a snail now. Next Saturday the answer to both may be no.

A note from us. A screen menu is full of bright, fast videos, and choosing is part of the fun for a small child. One way is to look at two slow programmes made for children this small, then let your child pick one of the two. It costs the free run of the menu, and some days the answer to both will be no.

Where this comes from: reviews that pooled many studies of young children and screens. In two, programmes made for learning went with slightly better language or vocabulary. The largest found no link between content made for children and how children think or get on with others. There, content that was violent, full of action or made for adults went with slightly lower ratings of children's behaviour and feelings. The links were small. Choosing a programme the way this story shows was not tested. Madigan and colleagues, 2020; Mallawaarachchi and colleagues, 2024; Jing and colleagues, 2023.

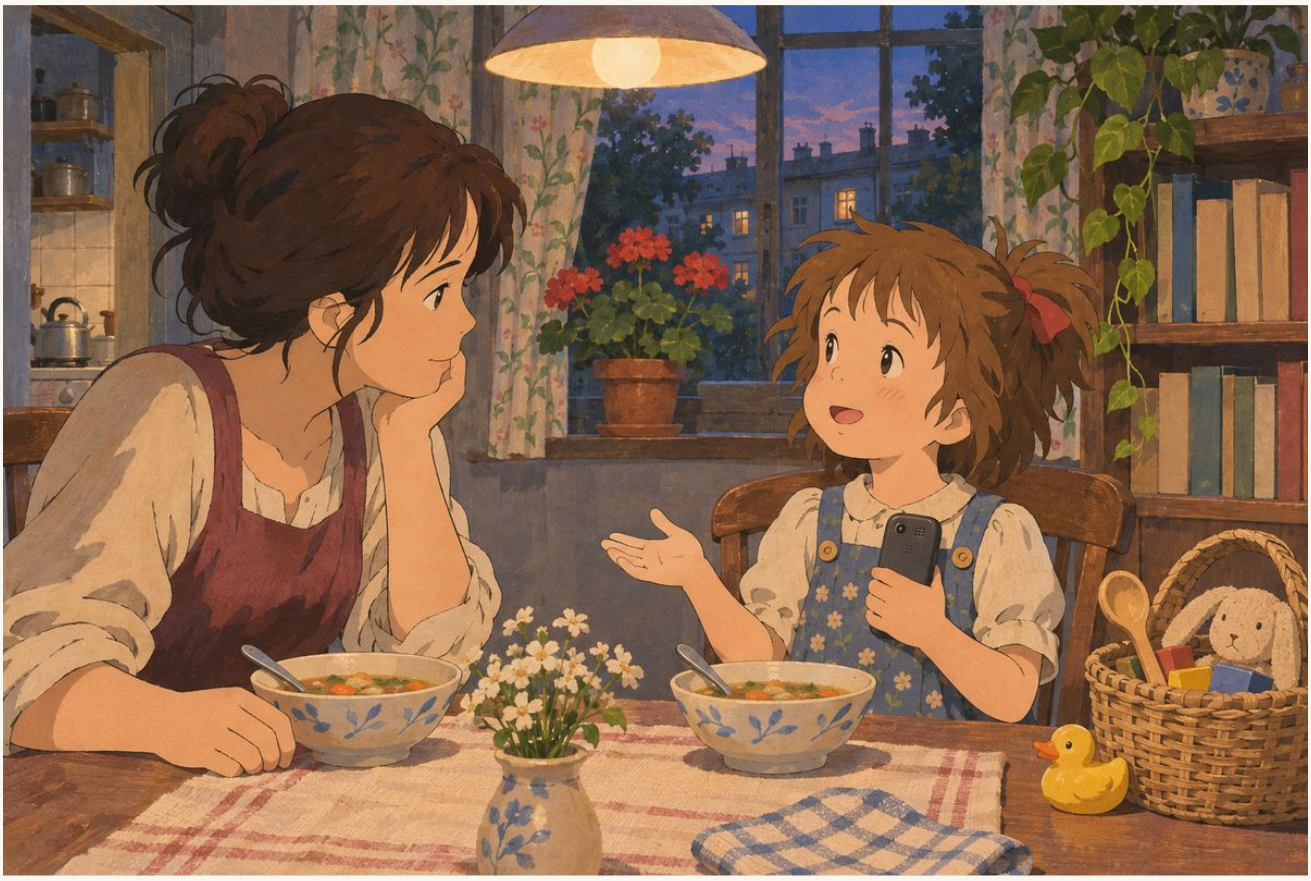
Reviews mostly of families as they live, and they do not all agree: the cause is not shown.

This is about what is on, not about how long, and it is not a promise about your child's words.

Not for everyone: not for the day when a free pick is the only thing that ends the argument. That counts too.

Pictures from Below

Helps with: Who owns devices and who can reach them



Maja, this one reached you through whose devices, and where they live. Here is a story about Danica, whose daughter already has a phone of her own.

Danica's old phone lives in the toy basket in the flat on Northside, between a wooden spoon and a rubber duck. It has a crack down one side and no card in it. It stopped being a phone the winter Danica got a new one, and since then it has been Iskra's.

Iskra is three. She uses it the way she uses the spoon, for whatever the day needs. Mostly she takes pictures: the cat's ear, the underside of the kitchen table, her own sock, the cat's ear again.

Nobody gave it to her. Danica simply did not throw it away, and one morning it was in the basket, and after that it was there.

At the library, a woman waiting for the stories to start, with a boy on her hip, watches Iskra photograph the carpet. "Is that hers?" she asks. "Her own?" She means nothing by it. She is only asking.

"It was mine," Danica says, and then, because that is not an answer, "Yes. Hers."

The word walks home with her along Ferry Street. Own. At the crossing Danica stops her at the curb with a hand on her shoulder. Iskra is filming her boots.

"Phone in the bag at the crossing," Danica says. "One hand for me." Iskra drops it in the bag and takes her hand, and they cross when the light changes. On the far side she wants it back at once.

That evening, at the table, Iskra asks for the video she took of the dog downstairs. Danica says after dinner. Iskra says, "Mine," and holds the phone against her chest. It is true. Danica has no answer to it, and they sit for a moment with the truth between them and the soup going cold. When it was Danica's phone, "not now" was easier to say.

After the bath, with Iskra asleep, she sits on the sofa with the old phone and looks through the pictures. The cat's ear. The table from underneath, like the roof of a cave. A blurred one of Danica herself, laughing, taken from the floor, her chin enormous. She has never seen herself from down there. Iskra sees her like that every day.

She does not know what the phone is to Iskra, or what taking it back now would do. She puts it in the basket, between the spoon and the duck, where Iskra will look for it in the morning.

A note from us. No practice has been tested here, so this note offers none. The story shows a three-year-old whose mother's old phone is already hers, one ordinary reason to leave it so and one ordinary hesitation. It settles neither.

Where this comes from: a study that recorded how long three- to five-year-olds spent on phones and tablets, including children who had a device of their own, and a small study that tried out a questionnaire for parents about screens at home. The questionnaire gives one score for access, use, content and watching together, and children from homes with a higher score did less well on early language and reading tests; higher scores also went with lower family income and less schooling for mothers. We searched and found no study of owning a device on its own; in the questionnaire it is one item of fifteen. Radesky and colleagues, 2020; Hutton and colleagues, 2020.

Paediatric bodies advise on this; the studies under the advice are thin, and we found none testing a choice like this one.

Guidance, not a study: the American Academy of Pediatrics, 2026, suggests waiting with a personal tablet.

Nothing here says what a device of her own does for a child of three. We searched and found no study of that choice alone.

Not for everyone: in some homes a hand-me-down tablet is the only way a parent's phone stays free for work, and that is a good reason.

One Episode

Helps with: The routine before bed



Maja, this one comes with the report rather than from your answers. Here is a story about Jonah.

Jonah cooks at Ferry Street Kitchen, a small restaurant. It is closed on Sundays and Mondays, and those are Jonah's nights with Ezra. Ezra, who is four, arrives on Sunday at noon with a backpack and a toy rabbit. He goes back on Tuesday morning. In between, the two of them live above the restaurant. In the afternoon they walk down to the bridge to look at the heron. It stands there like a man who is still deciding to miss the bus.

The evening goes like this: bath, pyjamas, and then one episode on the laptop in Jonah's bed, with Ezra against his shoulder. The bath is where the rabbit's news gets told, at length. Tonight the rabbit has been to the moon. The programme is about a dog who is a detective and wears a hat. It started because Jonah had never ended a day alone with a small child. The episode gave the evening an order he could follow, like the order slips in his kitchen: bath, dog, teeth, light. It is also, he would admit, the one half hour of his week when he sits still and somebody leans on him.

Tonight the laptop wants to update itself. It shows a grey bar and takes its time. They lie there and wait for it, and the bar creeps across.

Then it finishes, and they watch the dog in the hat, the same as ever. Ezra tells the dog who did it, as he does every week, and the dog does not listen.

Afterwards, with the light out, Jonah lies awake for a while and turns it over. He could not say whether this evening was different from any other. He has never timed how long Ezra takes to fall asleep, and he is not going to start. A kitchen has enough clocks in it. At Ezra's other home the day ends another way, and that is a good way as well. Here it ends with a dog in a hat.

He does not know if it should. He knows he would miss the shoulder.

He closes the laptop and puts it on the floor by the bed. He will step on it in the morning, as he does every Monday.

A note from us. No practice has been tested here, so this note offers none. The story shows an evening as it is in one of a child's two homes, and a parent who does not know whether to change it.

Where this comes from: a review of studies on young children's screens and sleep, and a review of how problem use is measured in small children. In the first, more screen time in a day, and screen time in the evening, went with poorer sleep. When its results on how long children sleep were pooled, this held for babies and toddlers and was not confirmed for preschoolers, and its authors rated the quality of the whole body of evidence as very low. In the second, use before sleep and a device in the bedroom went with measures of poorer sleep. Janssen and colleagues, 2020; Selak and colleagues, 2025.

Paediatric bodies advise on this. We looked for a study that tested a choice like this one and did not find one.

Guidance, not a study: the Canadian Paediatric Society, November 2022, and the UK Department for Education, March 2026, advise no screens in the hour before bed.

What an episode before bed does for a child of this age, one evening cannot tell you.

Not for everyone: in two homes the day may end in two ways, and that is ordinary.

Hop, Hop, Stop!

After lunch, nobody wants to sit still.

Mama Frog and Papa Frog and the three little frogs

are all at home. The big green rug is ready.

"Let's play Hop, Hop, Stop," says Papa Frog.

"I sing, you hop. When I stop, you stop."

Papa Frog sings, "La la la."

The little frogs hop, hop, hop.

Mama Frog hops too.

Then Papa Frog stops.

"Hop, hop... STOP!"

You could try: Read "Hop, hop..." and wait. Your child may shout "STOP!"

Everybody stops.

One little frog stops on one leg.

One little frog stops with a mouth wide open.

The smallest frog stops with both arms up, like a tree.

Nobody moves. Nobody blinks.

Papa Frog sings again, "La la la."

Off they go, wiggle, wiggle, wiggle.

Mama Frog wiggles her whole back.

The little frogs wiggle their toes.

"Hop, hop... STOP!"

Everybody stops.

Mama Frog stops in the middle of a wiggle.

A little frog giggles. Then another.

Then everybody giggles, and nobody is still at all.

You could ask: What funny shape would you stop in?

"My turn to sing," says the smallest frog.

Papa Frog and Mama Frog get ready.

"La la la, la la LA."

They hop. They spin. They flap their arms.

"Hop, hop… STOP!"

Papa Frog stops like a statue.

A statue with one arm up,

like a frog asking a question.

The smallest frog walks all the way round him.

Papa Frog does not move. Not even a bit.

Then the smallest frog whispers,

"Papa, you can move now."

Papa Frog flops down on the rug.

Flop.

The little frogs flop down beside him. Flop, flop, flop.

You could ask: Which game do you play at home?

Everybody lies on the big green rug,

puffing and smiling.

"Again?" asks Papa Frog.

"Again!" say the little frogs.

"Hop, hop…" sings Mama Frog. And off they go.

Why this is here. A story to dance along with, for an afternoon at home. "Hop, hop… STOP!" is there for your child to shout with you.

Can You Hear Me?

A new rug came today, rolled round a long cardboard tube.

Now the rug is on the floor.

The tube is for Big Rabbit and Small Rabbit.

Big Rabbit holds one end. Small Rabbit holds the other.

"Can you hear me?" whispers Big Rabbit, into the tube.

The whisper goes in at one end,

and down the tube,

and out at the other. All round and hollow.

"I can hear you!" whispers Small Rabbit.

You could try: Whisper "Can you hear..." and wait. Your child may whisper "me?"

Small Rabbit looks into the tube.

At the other end, a far-away eye looks back.

"I can see you," whispers Small Rabbit.

"Can you hear me?"

"I can hear you," whispers Big Rabbit.

Big Rabbit whispers a secret into the tube.

"Carrots."

Small Rabbit giggles at the other end.

Small Rabbit whispers a secret back.

"More carrots."

You could ask: What secret would you whisper into the tube?

Small Rabbit puts an ear to the tube.

There is no whisper now.

Just a soft sound, whoosh, like the sea.

"I can hear the sea," whispers Small Rabbit.

"In our tube?" whispers Big Rabbit.

Mum Rabbit comes in with the washing basket.

"What are you two doing?"

"Can you hear me, Mum?" whispers Small Rabbit.

Mum Rabbit puts her ear to the tube.

"I can hear you," she whispers. "And the sea."

Mum Rabbit whispers into the tube.

"Who wants a snack?"

Big Rabbit and Small Rabbit both put their ears to it.

"We can hear you!" they whisper, both at once.

Then they hop to the kitchen.

You could ask: Who would you like to whisper to?

Later, Small Rabbit is tired.

Big Rabbit lies on the new rug, beside Small Rabbit.

No tube this time. Just nose to nose.

"Can you hear me?" whispers Big Rabbit.

"I can hear you," whispers Small Rabbit. "Very close."

Why this is here. A story about siblings whispering through a cardboard tube. "Can you hear me?" comes back for your child to whisper with you.

Hide and Seek



Mo and Bit live among the shoes by the door.

Mo is round and likes to go fast.

Bit is long and likes to go far.

It is a slow afternoon at home.

Papa is in the front room, behind the sofa.

Noa is looking for him, on tiptoe.

"Ding," goes the tablet.

"Boo," goes Papa in the front room, from behind the sofa.

Mo stops, and Bit stops.

"Which one, Mo?" asks Bit.

"BOO!" says Mo.

Off we go.

You could try: Stop before the answer and let your child shout it with Mo. Whatever your child shouts is fine; read on. Say the ding small and flat; pop up for the boo.

In they go to the front room.

"Now you hide," says Papa.

"Behind big things, in the open. Not inside things."

Papa covers his eyes. "I will count. One, two, three..."

Noa hides behind the big chair.

Mo hides behind a cushion, round and fast.

Bit hides behind the sofa.

But Bit is long, and the end sticks out.

You could ask: Can you see Bit's end?

"Ten," says Papa. "Coming."

He looks under the table. No Noa.

He looks behind the door. No Noa.

Mo giggles, very quietly.

Papa stops. He listens.

Everybody is still.

Noa can hear her own breathing.

Bit can hear Mo trying not to giggle.

You could try: Be still together and listen for three breaths.

Papa tiptoes to the big chair.

He leans over, slowly, slowly.

"BOO!" says Noa, first.

Papa jumps. Then everybody laughs.

Back among the shoes, Mo and Bit settle down.

Mo is still a little bit giggly.

Bit is long and pleased.

Nobody found the end of Bit at all.

You could ask: Where could you hide, behind something big?

Why this is here. A daytime story with Mo and Bit, two small friends who came from the world of screens and live out here now. It is written so that being still and listening is the best part of the story. It is for daytime, not for bed. If your child asks where Mo and Bit are: they live among the shoes by the door. A story with screens in it was not tested, and you can skip this one.

The Chalk Road



Mo and Bit live among the shoes by the door.

Mo is round and likes to go fast.

Bit is long and likes to go far.

It is a dry, bright morning.

Papa has a box of fat chalks.

Noa has blue on her fingers already.

"Chalk is for the path, not for the mouth," says Papa.

"Ding," goes the tablet.

"Scritch," goes the chalk on the garden path, blue and yellow.

Mo stops, and Bit stops.

"Which one, Bit?" asks Mo.

"SCRITCH!" says Bit.

Off we go.

You could try: Stop before the answer and let your child shout it with Bit. Whatever your child shouts is fine; read on. Say the ding small and flat; scratch your nails for the scritch.

Out they go, and Papa shuts the door.

Noa draws a road on the path, scritch, scritch.

It is blue, with a yellow line down the middle.

"Brrm," says Mo, and off Mo goes along it, fast.

"Longer," says Bit.

So Noa draws it longer.

Round the flowerpot. Past the bench.

Under the washing line, and back again.

You could ask: Where would your road go?

Papa draws a little house at one end.

Noa draws a big round flower at the other.

Bit lies along the road, from the house to the flower.

Mo goes up and down the whole road.

Brrm, brrm, round the flowerpot, past the bench.

Then Mo stops at the little house.

"Home," says Mo.

You could try: Draw a road with your finger on the table, and drive along it.

Papa puts the lid on the chalk box.

Noa goes in to wash her blue fingers.

The road stays there, for tomorrow.

Back among the shoes, Mo and Bit settle down.

Mo is still a little bit zoomy.

Bit is long and blue at one end.

And the whole hall smells of chalk.

You could ask: What colour would your road be?

Why this is here. A daytime story with Mo and Bit, two small friends who came from the world of screens and live out here now. It is written so that making the road longer is the best part of the story. It is for daytime, not for bed. If your child asks where Mo and Bit are: they live among the shoes by the door. A story with screens in it was not tested, and you can skip this one.

The Green Hill



Mo and Bit live among the shoes by the door.

Mo is round and likes to go fast.

Bit is long and likes to go far.

Shoes go out into the world.

They come home smelling of it.

Today the whole hall smells of grass.

Mo sniffs the air, and Bit sniffs the air.

"Ding," goes the tablet.

"Whooo," goes the wind from the hill, all green and grassy.

Mo stops, and Bit stops.

"Which one, Bit?" asks Mo.

"WHOOO!" says Bit.

Off we go.

You could try: Stop before the answer and let your child shout it with Bit. Whatever your child shouts is fine; read on. Say the ding small and flat; give the whooo the breath.

Today it is Bit's turn to shout.

Out they go to the little green hill.

Noa comes, and Mama, and Dot the dog.

Up they climb, puff, puff, puff.

Near the top Bit presses a path in the grass, and up comes Mo.

You could ask: What can you see from the top of a hill?

Mo tucks in tight.

Roly, poly, DOWN we go!

Round goes Mo, with the sky underneath and the grass on top.

You could try: Stop just before "DOWN" and let your child shout it.

Bit is too long to roll.

So Bit slides down like a ribbon, whoosh, all the way to the bottom.

"Wheee," says Bit, the whole way down.

Mama rolls first, and Noa rolls after.

Dot runs rings round them both.

Roly, poly, DOWN we go.

At the bottom they lie in a heap, and the whole sky goes round.

"Again!" says everybody.

Up they climb, puff, puff, puff.

You could try: Roll across the rug, one at a time, with a clear space around you, or on a gentle grassy slope, with a grown-up at the bottom.

Back home, Mo and Bit settle down among the shoes.

Mo has grass stuck all over.

Bit is still dizzy.

And now the whole hall smells of the hill.

You could ask: Where did your feet take you today?

Why this is here. A daytime story with Mo and Bit, two small friends who came from the world of screens and live out here now. It is written so that the rolling is the best part of the story. It is for daytime, not for bed. If your child asks where Mo and Bit are: they live among the shoes by the door. A story with screens in it was not tested, and you can skip this one.

The Washing Line



Mo and Bit live among the shoes by the door.

Mo is round and likes to go fast.

Bit is long and likes to go far.

Today the wind is up, and the hall smells of soap.

Mama is out in the garden with the wet washing.

Noa has the basket of big pegs.

Mo sniffs the air, and Bit sniffs the air.

"Ding," goes the tablet.

"Flap," goes the sheet on the line, big and wet.

Mo stops, and Bit stops.

"Which one, Mo?" asks Bit.

"FLAP!" says Mo.

Off we go.

You could try: Stop before the answer and let your child shout it with Mo. Whatever your child shouts is fine; read on. Say the ding small and flat; give the flap the arms.

Today it is Mo's turn to shout.

Out they go to the garden.

Mama is pegging, and Noa is handing up the big pegs, one, two, three.

The line is high up, and the washing hangs down to Noa's knees.

The line is full of washing, and the wind is full of the line.

You could ask: What could you hang on a line?

Flap, flap, FLAP goes the big sheet.

It puffs out like a sail, and it falls back like a wall.

Noa goes behind it. Gone!

You could try: Stop just before "FLAP" and let your child shout it.

"Where has that Noa gone?" says Mama.

Flap goes the sheet, and "Here!" says Noa.

Flap goes the sheet, and Noa is gone again.

Dot the dog watches the wall of sheet.

Mo hides behind the empty basket, and pops out, and hides, and pops out.

Bit lies down in the long grass, and slowly, slowly, there is no Bit.

Everything smells of soap and wind.

You could ask: Where could you hide, so that I could still see your feet?

The wind drops, and the sheet hangs still.

"Here!" says Noa, and "There you are," says Mama, and Noa is found for good.

Everybody lies in the grass and watches the washing drip.

Back among the shoes, Mo and Bit settle down.

Mo smells of soap.

Bit smells of grass.

And now the whole hall smells of the wind.

You could ask: Who do you like to play peekaboo with?

Why this is here. A daytime story with Mo and Bit, two small friends who came from the world of screens and live out here now. It is written so that the hiding and the finding are the best part of the story. It is for daytime, not for bed. If your child asks where Mo and Bit are: they live among the shoes by the door. A story with screens in it was not tested, and you can skip this one.

The Little Wall



Mo and Bit live among the shoes by the door.

Mo is round and likes to go fast.

Bit is long and likes to go far.

The hall smells of wet coats, and the window is all rain.

Grandad is here, with his slippers on, down on the rug with Noa.

The tablet lies on the rug too, dark.

Mo sniffs the air, and Bit sniffs the air.

"Ding," goes the tablet.

"Tap, tap, tap," goes the rain on the window, all wet and grey.

Mo stops, and Bit stops.

"Which one, Bit?" asks Mo.

"DING!" says Bit.

Off we go.

You could try: Stop before the answer and let your child shout it with Bit. Whatever your child shouts is fine; read on. Say the ding small and flat; give the rain the fingers.

Today it is Bit's turn to shout.

Over they go to the rug.

Grandad picks up the tablet, and Noa leans in under his arm.

Mo and Bit sit by Grandad's knee, at the back of the tablet.

Back here, the tablet is a little wall.

You could ask: Who do you like to lean on?

The tablet goes, and Noa laughs.

Grandad laughs too, a big slow laugh that goes on and on.

From behind the little wall, Mo and Bit hear it all.

The tablet going, the laughing, and the rain, tap, tap, tap.

You could try: Stop just before "tap, tap, tap" and let your child do the rain with their fingers on your knee.

Mo goes tap, tap, tap on the floor, along with the rain.

Bit goes long and thin along the edge of the rug, and listens.

Dot the dog is asleep by the door, and the rain taps on.

You could ask: What else goes tap?

Then the tablet goes quiet.

Noa puts it down on the rug, and there it lies, dark.

Grandad gets up, slow, slow, slow.

"Soup," says Mama from the kitchen.

Back among the shoes, Mo and Bit settle down.

Mo smells of rug.

Bit smells of Grandad's knee.

And the hall smells of rain, and the rain goes on tapping.

You could ask: What can you hear right now?

Why this is here. A daytime story with Mo and Bit, two small friends who came from the world of screens and live out here now. It is written so that the leaning and the listening are the best part of the story. It is for daytime, not for bed. If your child asks where Mo and Bit are: they live among the shoes by the door. A story with screens in it was not tested, and you can skip this one.

The Big Squeeze



Mo and Bit live among the shoes by the door.

Mo is round and likes to go fast.

Bit is long and likes to go far.

Today it is cold, and the hall smells of coats.

Noa is drawing at the little table.

Mo and Bit are under it, catching the crayons that fall.

"Ding," goes the tablet.

"Crunch," goes the gravel in the lane, big and slow.

Mo stops, and Bit stops.

"Which one, Mo?" asks Bit.

"CRUNCH!" says Mo.

Off we go.

You could try: Stop before the answer and let your child shout it with Mo. Whatever your child shouts is fine; read on. Say the ding small and flat; give the crunch the boots.

Today it is Mo's turn to shout.

Out they go to the door.

Crunch, crunch, crunch, go the boots up the lane.

Dot the dog is there first, tail going thump, thump, thump.

You could ask: Who do you think is coming up the lane?

Mama opens the door.

It is Grandad, in his big coat, with his big arms.

"Who wants a squeeze?" says Grandad.

Noa comes, and Mama comes, and Dot gets there first.

Grandad sits down in the big chair.

Grandad lifts Noa onto his lap.

Dot sits on his feet.

Squeeze, squeeze, SQUEEZE.

You could try: Stop just before the last "SQUEEZE", and give a grown-up one, arms round the middle.

"Is there room for Mama?"

"There is room!"

In leans Mama, and up comes teddy, and up on top go Mo and Bit.

Squeeze, squeeze, SQUEEZE.

You could ask: Who would you squeeze into the big chair?

The big chair creaks.

Grandad laughs his rumbly laugh, and the whole heap goes up and down.

Noa can feel the laugh right through Grandad's coat.

Teddy is in the heap, and nobody knows how.

Back among the shoes, Mo and Bit settle down.

Mo is still going up and down.

Bit is still bent from laughing.

And now the whole hall smells of Grandad's coat.

You could ask: Who gives the biggest squeezes you know?

Why this is here. A daytime story with Mo and Bit, two small friends who came from the world of screens and live out here now. It is written so that the squeeze is the best part of the story. It is for daytime, not for bed. If your child asks where Mo and Bit are: they live among the shoes by the door. A story with screens in it was not tested, and you can skip this one.

Where this comes from: trials of programmes that showed parents how to share picture books and talk about them. Children's language grew more than in families without the programme. In the shortest programmes the gain was not clear, and the difference between short and longer ones was not clearly shown either. A review of one talk-rich style found its extra gain smaller for four- and five-year-olds, and for children from lower-income homes or whose mothers had less schooling. Another review, of book-sharing led by parents, teachers or researchers, found the gain small, close to none when the comparison was another activity, and not clear later on. A recent, pre-registered trial of a parent-led programme that combined shared reading with teaching words and story-telling found no more language growth than in families without it. The programmes, not this story, were tested. Dowdall and colleagues, 2020; Mol and colleagues, 2008; Noble and colleagues, 2019; Burgoyne and colleagues, 2025.

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