

**TOO SMALL  
TO FAIL**



# Too Small to Fail Community Volunteer Toolkit



# Hello!

Welcome and thank you for your interest in being a community volunteer, in support of the work of *Too Small to Fail*!

*Too Small to Fail*, a joint initiative of the Clinton Foundation and The Opportunity Institute, is leading a national public awareness and action campaign called “Talking is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing” to support parents and caregivers with tools to **engage in language-rich interactions** with their young children from birth. Research shows that simple actions—like talking, reading and singing—can make a huge difference in preparing children for success in school and beyond.

Yet, studies have found that almost 60 percent of children start kindergarten unprepared, lagging behind their peers in critical literacy skills. And in lower-income neighborhoods, there is an average of one age-appropriate book per 300 children, compared to higher-income neighborhoods where a child has an average of 11 books at home.<sup>1</sup>

Through partnerships with pediatricians, hospitals, faith-based leaders, community-based organizations, businesses, entertainment industry leaders, and others, *Too Small to Fail* is meeting parents where they are to support young children’s early brain and language development.

*Too Small to Fail* is proud to partner with Encore.org, which leverages the passion and skills of millions of people to make a difference around the world. Working with Encore.org’s Generation to Generation (Gen2Gen) campaign we are engaging the rich talent of adults 50+ in promoting children’s early literacy—right in their own communities. Gen2Gen was launched by Encore.org at the end of 2016, to inspire and enable adults 50 and older to improve the lives of young people who need champions. We believe that older adults can make a truly unique and meaningful difference promoting early literacy development, whether they are grandparents, caring for young children at home or volunteering in their local communities.

No matter where you live, there are many ways to support young children’s early brain and language development, by taking simple actions within your family and community.

Our **Community Volunteer Toolkit** outlines the different ways you can become involved to help our nation’s youngest children prepare for success in school and beyond. We hope you find it helpful as you select an activity that fits your schedule, skills, and interests. Together, we can help ensure that parents, grandparents, and other caregivers have the information and tools they need to set children up for success in school and beyond!

We truly appreciate your interest. Because of caring and talented individuals like you, we can all work together to create brighter futures for children. Thank you!

Sincerely,



Patti Miller  
Director, *Too Small to Fail*  
Clinton Foundation



Kara Dukakis  
Director, *Too Small to Fail*  
The Opportunity Institute

# CONTENTS

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OVERVIEW OF VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES ..... 4

AT HOME ..... 6

IN YOUR COMMUNITY ..... 8

ADDITIONAL TIPS AND MESSAGES TO SHARE ..... 11

ABOUT TOO SMALL TO FAIL AND GENERATION TO GENERATION ..... 13

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND THANKS ..... 14



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<sup>1</sup> Neuman, Susan B. and Naomi Moland (2016). "Book Deserts: The Consequences of Income Segregation on Children's Access to Print." Urban Education.

# OVERVIEW OF VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

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There are a variety of ways for you to roll up your sleeves and get started. This toolkit was designed to allow for flexibility so that you may tailor your contributions in ways most meaningful to you that best meets the needs of your schedule.

The toolkit is organized by *where* you can make a big impact—either at home or in your community (or both!)—and then offers a range of tips and ideas.

- You'll notice the tips focused on what you can do **at home** are centered on conversations you can have with your grandchildren or other children in your care. You can ask questions, tell stories, and more. We also feature some of the many tip sheets, videos, and activities we have created that you can share with your friends and family. Sharing these materials helps equip more people with the tools to talk, read and sing with young children!
- The tips focused on what you can do **in your community** suggest ways you can take action to promote early brain and language development more broadly. These ideas require a bit more planning, materials, and effort than the others, but they will reach families beyond your own.



## Share your story!

After you've volunteered in support of the work of *Too Small to Fail*, please [share your story with us](https://www.generationtogether.org/submit-your-story) by visiting [generationtogether.org/submit-your-story](https://www.generationtogether.org/submit-your-story)! We love featuring the great work of our volunteers which can inspire and encourage others to lend a hand.

*Too Small to Fail* will review these stories and nominate a select few for The [2018 AARP Purpose Prize Award™](#). This award is given by the American Association of Retired Persons annually to five exceptional individuals making a difference in their communities. Award recipients each receive \$50,000 to celebrate their efforts and to help broaden the scope of their work.

Volunteers who support *Too Small to Fail* and submit a story about their experience will also receive a "Talking is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing" tote bag.



***“I volunteered with Too Small to Fail at a local laundromat event in Las Vegas. It was one of the most amazing events ever! The hope of touching even one child’s imagination with the gift of books and reading is truly magical.”***

*—Linda M. Gomez, CEO and Founder, Et AI Beauty, LLC, and Too Small to Fail Volunteer (Las Vegas, NV)*

You’ll discover there are many ways you can support young children’s early brain and language development.

Continue reading to see how you can make a difference:

1. At Home
2. In Your Community



**Throughout the toolkit, we often link to materials (tip sheets, videos, etc.) that can be accessed on our [talkingisteaching.org/communities](https://talkingisteaching.org/communities) website.**

# AT HOME

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There are many ways you can support the early brain and language development of the little ones in your family or in your care—by talking, reading, and singing together every day.

## While Reading

- Cuddle up with your grandchild or the children in your care as you read a book out loud together. Point and describe the things you see on each page.
- Ask questions like, “Who is your favorite character?” and “What do you think will happen next? Why do you think he feels so happy (or sad)?”
- Let the child/children read the first page, and then take turns. Change the reader each time you flip a page. Even if a child can’t read yet, she can tell you what she sees on the page.
- Share an oral story about a family tradition or favorite memory. Passing down stories from one generation to the next is a wonderful way to bond and build literacy skills.

## During Diaper Time

- Listen to this “Diaper Time is Talk Time” [Spotify playlist](#) featuring country music singer Martina McBride and sing with the children in your care during diaper time.
- Count together. As you speak, wiggle baby’s toes or fingers. Your gentle voice helps her feel loved, and counting introduces her to early math concepts.

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***“From my perspective as a parent and teacher, it is so important to ensure children are prepared for kindergarten. Building a strong foundation in literacy requires talking, reading, and singing together from very early on.”***

*—Cathy Crawford, Retired Pre-School and Kindergarten Teacher (Lancaster, OH)*

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DIAPER TIME IS TALK TIME

**SING TOGETHER**

Sing “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes” as you point to those parts of your baby’s body.

#DIAPERTIMETALKTIME

National Diaper Bank Network

TALK READ SING

SMALL TO FAIL

## After School

- Ask children about their day. You can ask questions like:
  - What was the happiest part of your day?
  - What was the silliest thing that happened today?
  - What is something new you practiced doing today?
  - What book did you read today? What was the story about?"
- Ask children about the people at their school who help them learn and have fun. For example:
  - Who are your teachers? What did you do with them today?
  - Who are your friends and what are your favorite things to do together?

## While Grocery Shopping

- Play a game looking for items on your grocery list. You may say, "I am a big round fruit that is green and hard on the outside and pink and soft on the inside. It has black seeds too. That's right, a watermelon!"
- Count the items as you put them in the bag or cart. For example, "One... two... three... four... five. Five apples all together!"
- Dance together and sing along to our "Let's Talk about Healthy Foods!" [Spotify playlist](#).

## While Doing Laundry

- While spending time at your local laundromat or doing laundry at home, talk about the things you see, how your clothes feel, and the different scents you smell.
- Name the colors you see all around. You

can ask, "What color are my socks? What color are yours?" You can also use words like *bright* or *dark* to describe the colors.

- Talk about numbers and use math words like *pair*. You can say, "Let's find a pair of socks. Pair means two things that match."

## Before and After Eating

- Use the items on your plate to inspire conversation and questions. You may ask, "What shapes do you see on our plate?" or "How many round objects on the table can we count?"
- Watch [this video](#) from Sesame Street on talking about eating healthy foods.

## When Dancing, Playing, and Singing

- As you slide and swing, share your favorite memories of playing as a child. You can also ask questions like, "What's your favorite part of the playground?" or "Who is your favorite person to play with?"
- Share fun rhymes or poems while playing together on the playground. For example, "Do you like to play? I do every day. Hold my hand, and together, we can play!"
- Dance to [these music playlists](#) we created with Spotify. The "[Playtime](#)" playlist features songs like "Freeze Dance," "Chicken Dance," and "We Are Family," – all of which encourage moving your body!



# IN YOUR COMMUNITY

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Here are some tips and ideas to promote literacy in your community. There are many ways to inspire families, friends, and neighbors to talk, read, and sing together at the different places you visit within your community.

## At the Library

- Offer your time to become a volunteer reader at your local library. You also can share *Too Small to Fail* tip sheets and [resources](#). To find a library near you, contact the [American Library Association](#) or reference the [American Library Directory](#).
- Host a reading activity in your native language for dual-language learners. [Research shows](#) bilingualism has many benefits for young children!
- Create a puppet show for children and be sure to ask them questions.



## At School

- Help distribute books by volunteering at the school's book fair.
- Host or coordinate a quarterly community book drive and send donations to your local Head Start or child care center.

## At the Diaper Bank

- Contact your local diaper bank or email [info@diaperbanknetwork.org](mailto:info@diaperbanknetwork.org) to find a place to volunteer near you. You can view a list of the 300+ National Diaper Bank Network members [here](#).
- Host or coordinate a quarterly community book and diaper drive to collect critical basic needs items for donations.



***“Diapers and books may seem like an odd couple, but they are both indispensable ingredients for early childhood success. The volunteers that support our network are making a real difference in the lives of infants and toddlers who need it most by helping to provide these necessities.”***

*—Joanne Goldblum, Chief Executive Officer, National Diaper Bank Network (New Haven, CT)*

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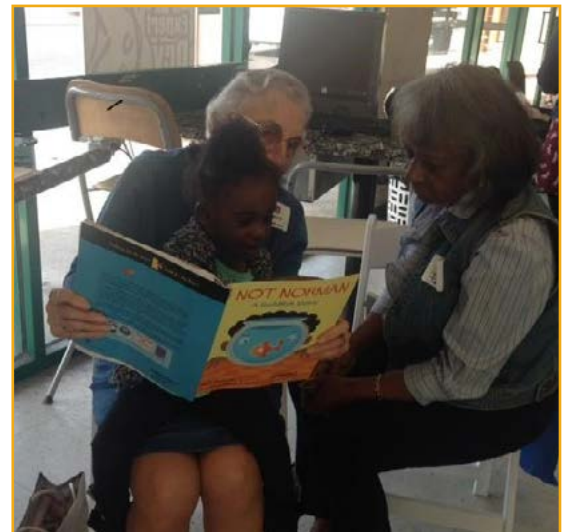
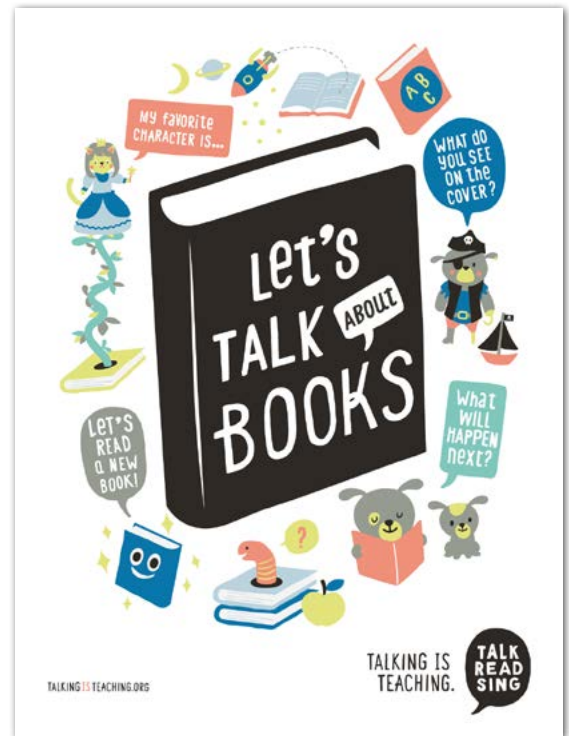
- Print this “Diaper Time is Talk Time” tip sheet in [English](#) and [Spanish](#) and share copies with your diaper bank representative, so it can be distributed in bundles of basic needs items.

## At the Laundromat

- Identify a local laundromat using [findalaundry.org](http://findalaundry.org) and work with the manager or owner to host a read-aloud event. Use this [flyer template](#) to inform customers ahead of time so they can bring their children. Then, choose a favorite book to share!
  - If you can, schedule a recurring time to read with the children so families know when to expect story time. You can add fun activities like a puppet show or bring hands-on materials, like bubbles or play dough, to spark conversation and creativity.
- Help build a library at the laundromat so customers can borrow books during their visit. You may wish to build a book rack, collect book donations in your community, or donate books yourself.

## At Your Place of Worship

- Offer up this [five-part training series](#) on how to run a family engagement event or related programming within your place of worship.
- Host or coordinate a family meal or potluck and build in early literacy activities for families.
- Use [these flyers](#) to invite family, friends, and neighbors to a special event.



***“We’re encouraging parents to make sure that their children develop strong and extensive vocabularies. We have learned that kids who know more words by the time they enter Pre-K are much more likely to build literacy skills early.”***

*—Reverend Dr. Ray Owens, Metropolitan Baptist Church (Tulsa, OK)*

## At the Farmer's Market

- Find a local farmer's markets at [www.ams.usda.gov/local-food-directories/farmersmarkets](http://www.ams.usda.gov/local-food-directories/farmersmarkets) and contact the organizers to host an on-site children's activity. You may want to check with them on any rules or guidelines you would need to follow.
- To get started, choose a specific time and place at the farmer's market.
- Select fun, age-appropriate books related to healthy foods, and prepare supplies for hands-on activities.
- On the day of your event, begin with a read aloud. After the reading time, introduce an activity.
  - For example, divide groups into toddlers and infants. Give each group a paper bag filled with a few fruits and vegetables.
  - For toddlers: Encourage a child to reach into the bag without looking and feel one object inside. Ask questions such as, *"What does it feel like? Is it round? Long? Rough or soft? Smooth or bumpy? What could it be?"* Repeat with another item and child until everyone has a turn.
  - For infants: Give a fruit or vegetable to an infant to touch while you talk about it. You can describe its shape, color, texture, and taste. Repeat with another item and child until everyone has a turn.
  - End the activity with a fun, healthy food sing-along, such as "Apples and Bananas."

## At the Children's Hospital

- Identify a local children's hospital or pediatrician's office. You can locate an American Academy of Pediatrics pediatrician [here](#) or connect with the child life office at your local children's hospital.
- Start a book drive in your community and donate these books to your local children's hospital. Together, you can help families build their own home libraries!



## ADDITIONAL TIPS AND MESSAGES TO SHARE

### Messages to Share with Parents and Caregivers of Young Children:

Become a knowledgeable person in your family and community on the importance of early brain and language development. Take time to reach out to parents and families of young children to share the following messages!

- Learning begins the moment your child is born, so keep doing what you're doing! It's so important to talk, read, and sing with your child every day—even if he/she can't talk back yet.
- Share back-and-forth conversations about the everyday things you see and do together—like riding in the car, going for a walk, or shopping for groceries. Make cuddling and reading a part of your bedtime routine. Hold your child close and sing a song together.
- When you talk, read, and sing with your child every day, you're building her brain and preparing her for success in school and in life. It'll make your child feel special, and loved, too!
- You're doing great, Mommy (or Daddy, Grandma, Grandpa, Aunt, Uncle, Friend, Neighbor)!



### Read Aloud Tips:

1. Point to the pictures and ask children “*who, what, when, where, why*” questions about what they see.
2. Provide children with opportunities to choose the books and cuddle up as you read together.
3. Let children hold the book and turn the pages.
4. Bring the story to life by using different voices for each character and acting out scenes with body movements.
5. Encourage families to read with their children every day – in whatever language they feel most comfortable. Share the location of their nearest library and weekly story time hours. To find a library near you, contact the [American Library Association](#) or reference the [American Library Directory](#).

# TIPS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA USE

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*Too Small to Fail* uses social media to reach as many parents and caregivers as possible and amplify the importance of talking, reading, and singing.

Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) @2SmallToFail to join the conversation. You can share the sample posts below, “like” and “retweet” ours, or make your own!

## Sample Social Media Posts

- Talking is teaching! Enjoy conversations every day with your little one. Visit [talkingisteaching.org](#)
- Every conversation, song, or story you share with your children counts, and it builds their brains. Visit [talkingisteaching.org](#) for tips!
- Talk, read, and sing with your children—right from the start. It builds their brains and prepares them for success in school and beyond. Visit [talkingisteaching.org](#) for more info.
- Children learn through play and conversation. Visit [talkingisteaching.org](#) for ideas!
- Books are brain boosters. Read one with your little one today! Visit [talkingisteaching.org](#).
- Start a jingle! Songs and dance are a fun way for children to learn language & move their bodies. Music playlists here: [spotify.com/sing](#)



# ABOUT TOO SMALL TO FAIL AND GENERATION TO GENERATION

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## Too Small to Fail

*Too Small to Fail*, a joint initiative of the Clinton Foundation and The Opportunity Institute, is leading a national public awareness and action campaign to promote the importance of early brain and language development and to support parents with tools to talk, read, and sing with their young children from birth. Today, almost 60 percent of children in the United States start kindergarten unprepared, lagging behind their peers in critical language skills. Through partnerships with pediatricians, hospitals, faith-based leaders, community-based organizations, businesses, entertainment industry leaders, and others, *Too Small to Fail* is meeting parents where they are to help them prepare their children for success in school and beyond. Whether at the pediatrician's office or the playground, *Too Small to Fail* aims to make small moments big by creating opportunities for meaningful interactions anytime, anywhere.

## Generation to Generation

Generation to Generation, a campaign powered by Encore.org, works to inspire people over 50 to make a difference in the lives of vulnerable children and youth. The campaign is grounded in the belief that every child deserves a web of support and every older person has something to give.

This fall, Gen2Gen Reads will work to get more books in the hands of children who need them, while encouraging supporters – in dozens of ways – to boost local literacy efforts. To get updates, go to [iamgen2gen.org](http://iamgen2gen.org).



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND THANKS

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We would like to thank you for your support of the mission and work of *Too Small to Fail*, and for your commitment to talk, read, and sing with the children in your care and in your community.

We are truly grateful for the support of Encore.org and Gen2Gen. Thanks to their dedication, we can mobilize more caring adults—like you—to support young children’s early brain and language development.

We also thank all our partners who shared special insights in order to create this resource: the Arkansas Campaign for Grade Level Reading, the City of Minneapolis, the Coin Laundry Association, the Metropolitan Baptist Church, the National Diaper Bank Network, Shane’s Inspiration, UCSF Benioff Children’s Hospital Oakland. They serve as important advocates for our nation’s littlest learners.

