

Rules and Expectations for Storytime

1. My storytimes are primarily for preschoolers, though I have some toddlers as well. Therefore, when considering what are developmentally appropriate expectations, I expect them to be able to follow given routines, and anticipate the patterns of storytime. I've found this to be true, as when I have changed up the order of my usual presentation (perhaps by putting my second book after our mystery box activity), my audience responds with confusion or disinterest after the puzzle.
I also expect my group be able to follow simple instructions, and treat their fellow storytime participants with kindness and respect. I know that I won't ever have 100% of their attention, but I ask them to refrain from playing with library toys during storytime. Finally, I expect to have an invested audience – though I recognize that this is largely a responsibility of mine. To this end, I encourage participation, and make significant efforts to attune my storytimes to be something that will hold the interest of both the kids and their caregivers.
2. At my library, the rules that I uphold are primarily food-based. With the exception of summer lunches, we request that patrons not eat in the library, and have drinks only in covered containers. So far, I have not had difficulty in upholding these rules – an occasional reminder is all that is needed when I wish to correct a patron's behavior. We also operate under the Golden Rule at storytime, though this is less library policy than preventing us from getting into situations that would be difficult to resolve. Asking to play with each other's toys or stuffed animals is a must, as is requesting *before* hugs, handshakes, or any other method of touching another person. Requesting that the audience keep their hands, and their puppet friends, to each other usually works to uphold this rule.
3. The behaviors that I require from my storytime group primarily overlap with the library's enforcement of the Golden Rule. I require that participants be kind and courteous to each other, and to me. I request that people not go behind my big feltboard, because it's a distraction to others – though I've found that I don't have to make such a request if I store all the toys in the back room before storytime begins.
I would also require that everyone has the opportunity to hear and see the stories and games that I present. Part of this comes from me: I'll stand up for songs to demonstrate for the whole audience, but another part involves reminding excited kids that others won't be able to see if they're standing in front of the group. I can normally rely on caregivers to help me with these issues.
Finally, I require the understanding that storytime is an optional event. If people want to get up and leave, or their child is feeling squirmy, they need to know that they can do that, no judgement or requests necessary.
4. I think that it would be reasonable to ask adults at my storytime to engage in the event with their children. I would request that they not be on their phones, because kids will look at that behavior and model the apparent disinterest. Additionally, it's a lot more fun if the adults get involved too. To that end, I will add in fun facts or jokes for the adults to my storytime, so that they stay just as interested and invested as their progeny.

5. A good way to communicate my expectations at storytime would be an initial blurb at the event's onset. At present, I have not employed such a tactic, and just used reminders throughout as needed. While this 'spot-welding' approach works at present, I think that its effectiveness is greatly limited by the size of the storytime audience. My weekly storytime usually caps out at about 10 people, so I can afford to address specific behaviors with children and their caretakers in the moment, and present a constructive alternative. However, if I was presenting for a larger audience, I would not be able to address each individual concern, and a setting of ground rules would be a much needed approach.