

READING TO BABIES (Birth-1Year)

Why Read to Babies

It is never too early to begin reading to a child. Even though babies do not understand words, their brains are making connections from what they hear you say. Here are some great reasons to read to babies:

- 1) Reading, rocking, and cuddling can calm a baby and helps her associate reading with contentment.
- 2) Sharing books through reading, talking, and singing helps to develop a positive relationship between the baby and the caregiver.
- 3) Sharing books with babies helps them to become good listeners, learning to focus on the human voice and increasing their attention span. As they listen, they develop language and an increased vocabulary.
- 4) Children learn a greater variety of vocabulary from books rather than the spoken word.
- 5) Babies who enjoy books are more likely to grow into preschoolers who are interested in learning to read on their own.

When and How Should I Read to Babies

Read anytime or anyplace! Set aside regular reading times, but be flexible based upon the child's mood. Consider reading to a baby at feeding time.

Give reading time with the baby your full attention. Turn off music or television. Don't let phone calls interrupt book sharing.

Hold the child on your lap or close to you. Switch books if the child is not interested.

Keep it short. At first, expect babies to pay attention for very short periods of time, even less than one minute. Their attention span will increase as you share more and more books and as they grow.

You don't have to read all the words in the book. It is acceptable to hold a conversation about the pictures found in the book rather than reading all the words. By looking at books, babies will learn that pictures have meaning. When you point out things in a picture, babies will begin to use their eyes to connect the pictures with words. If the baby seems very interested in a particular page, stay on that page and study it.

Reread favorite books. Repetition helps a baby learn.

When reading to a baby, help the baby participate by making sounds and doing motions. Vary the pace of your reading and the tone of voice.

Ask the child questions about the pictures or the story, then pause, then answer your question. This will help the baby begin to understand the flow of conversation.

Let the baby explore the book, including helping you turn the pages.

Get creative by singing the words of the book or using the baby's name for a character in the book.

What Should I Read?

Wordless picture books containing pictures of objects a baby would know (identification books).

Pick books with clear, bright, eye catching primary color pictures or pictures with high contrast (black on white) along with simple words.

Books with rhythm and rhyme, such as Mother Goose and nursery rhymes, will grab a baby's attention. Don't forget to read poems.

Start with sturdy cardboard (board) books. As the child grows, he will be able to enjoy longer books with pictures and stories.

Vinyl or cloth books can be washed and are probably best for those babies who insist on putting books into the mouth.

Read environmental print, such as cereal boxes to a baby.

Hold a conversation about magazine pictures as well as photo albums or scrapbooks.

Ask your local librarian to help you select age-appropriate books.

What Else Can I Do To Help a Baby Develop Language?

Singing is a great way to introduce new words and letter sounds. It breaks down the sounds of language into small parts. Make up songs for daily rituals and about people the baby knows. The baby will focus on your singing voice, even if you are not a professional singer!

Do rhymes, finger plays, knee bouncers, and ticklers. Make these activities part of daily routines, such as mealtime and diapering.

Tell cultural stories, such as simple folk tales.

Make up stories, featuring familiar people and objects, such as a favorite toy.

Talk to the baby as you do routine activities. Encourage babbling and cooing.

Describe things in your environment. As you look out the window or take a walk, talk about colors, shapes, sizes, animals, objects, and feelings.

READING TO TODDLERS (1-2 YEARS)

Why Read to Toddlers?

It is never too early to begin reading to a child. Here are some great reasons to read to toddlers:

- 1) Reading and cuddling can calm a toddler as well as help her develop positive feelings about reading and books.
- 2) Sharing books through reading, talking, and singing helps to develop a positive relationship between the toddler and the caregiver.
- 3) Sharing books with toddlers helps them to become good listeners, increasing attention span. As they listen and participate in book sharing, they develop language and a sense of competence by mastering repetitive rhymes and phrases.
- 4) Children learn a greater variety of vocabulary from books rather than the spoken word. Research shows that children who have larger vocabularies usually become better readers.
- 5) Toddlers are eager learners. Books introduce the world to them, exposing them to places and things not in their immediate world.
- 6) Toddlers who enjoy books are more likely to grow into preschoolers who want to learn to read on their own.

When and How Should I Read to Toddlers?

Toddlers are always busy, ready to explore their world with open curiosity. Read to a toddler whenever he is rested and in a good mood and you can get him to keep still for a few moments. It is important that interaction around books be a positive, not negative experience. Not all toddlers will be able to sit quietly for book sharing, so consider reading to a toddler when he is playing quietly with play dough, puzzles, or drawing with crayons.

Give reading time with a toddler your full attention. Turn off music or television. Don't let phone calls interrupt book sharing.

Have the child on your lap or close to you. When it is book sharing time, bring several books and switch books if the child is not interested in the first choice. Read slowly so a toddler can make sense of what is happening in the story.

Keep it short. At first, expect toddlers to pay attention for very short periods, less than 5 minutes, several times a day. Gradually increase the length of each book sharing session. Attention span will increase as you share more and more books and as the child grows.

You don't have to read all the words in the book. It is acceptable to hold a conversation about the pictures found in the book, rather than reading all the words. By looking at books, toddlers will learn that pictures have meaning. Point out things in a book that a toddler may have seen at home or in the classroom (ball, for example). Talk about the color, shape, and size of objects, as well as what is alike and different. Talk about the feelings of the story characters. If the toddler seems very interested in a particular page, stay on that page and study it.

Reread favorite books. Repetition helps a toddler develop memory and language skills. As you read, occasionally ask the child to look at the pictures and locate or identify objects in the picture, asking "Where is the ___?" or "What's that?". Using a book that has been read to the child numerous times, stop reading the story and ask the toddler, "What happens next?"

When reading to a toddler, ask the toddler to participate by making sounds, doing motions, and joining in on repetitious phrases. Vary the pace of your reading and the tone of voice. Use the child's name in the story to help capture his attention.

Ask the child questions about the pictures or the story, then pause, and allow the toddler time to answer your question. If the toddler does not answer the question after a reasonable period of time, state the answer yourself. This will encourage the toddler to participate in the flow of conversation. Point out the details in the pictures that you think the child may miss. When you reach the end of the story, talk about what happened in the story and how it relates to the toddler's real life experiences.

Let the toddler explore the book. Talk about the parts of the book, such as the cover, back, spine, and pages. Show how to hold the book correctly and how to open the book from right to left. Have the toddler help you turn the pages.

Get creative by singing the words of the book.

Use your finger to follow the words on a page. This will help a toddler learn that the English language is read from left to right and from the top to the bottom of the page. Explain unfamiliar words in terms the toddler can understand.

Most important is to make the book sharing experience FUN! It is okay to get silly as a way to involve the child in the book. If the reading experience is enjoyable, the toddler will want to spend more time sharing books. The result will be an increase in his exposure to language.

What Should I Read?

Read cardboard (board) books that are durable and easy for the child to hold. Gradually begin to introduce books with traditional paper pages.

Start with identification books, wordless books, and books with a very simple story. Look for books with bright, primary color pictures without much detail.

Books about a toddler's daily routine, such as dressing, bedtime, self-help skills, and eating, including toddler experiences, like learning about their body and feelings, are usually popular. If a toddler has a special interest, such as trains, have a group of train books to "rope him in" to story sharing.

Toddlers enjoy books with pictures of real objects and animals. Choose stories with brief, simple plots and short sentences per page, gradually adding books with more complex sentences and new words.

Stories with rhythm, rhyme, repetition, and predictability will capture their attention.

Interactive books, such as pop-up books, as well as books with flaps, pull tabs, and "touch and feel" pictures will involve senses and motor skills along with reading.

Introduce simple concept books, such as ABC, colors, shapes, and counting books.

Have a toddler "read" a book to you, by letting him tell you what he sees in the pictures.

Have books on a shelf accessible to toddlers, so that they can select and look at books on their own.

Ask your local librarian to help you select age-appropriate books.

What Else Can I Do To Help a Toddler Develop Language?

Singing is a great way to introduce new words and letter sounds. It breaks down the sounds of language into small parts. Sing childhood or cultural favorites. Make up songs for daily rituals and about people the toddler knows. You don't have to be a professional singer for the toddler to enjoy your musical efforts!

Talk with a toddler, not just give the toddler directions. Talk to them, using short sentences, about what is going on around you and ask him questions. Toddlers need to learn how conversation works, an invitation to exchange information.

What Else Can I Do To Help a Toddler Develop Language?—cont.

Label your feelings and those that the toddler may be feeling. Begin to discuss with a toddler the concept of same/different. Talk about your own experiences as a child.

Do rhymes, poems, and finger plays, emphasizing the rhyming words. Make up silly, nonsense rhymes of your own. Make these activities part of daily routines, such as mealtime and diapering.

Tell cultural stories, such as simple folk tales.

Make up and tell stories with the names of children in the classroom or names of family members and pets. Use lots of descriptive words for color, size, shape, etc.

Read environmental print, such as signs and labels. Point out letters on toys, food boxes, and other objects around the classroom or home.

Share magazines, homemade books, scrapbooks, and photo albums with toddlers.

Try using puppets and other props as you tell a story, sing a song, read a book, or recite a rhyme. Simple stick puppets are easy to make and work well with toddlers.