



WHY IT IS NEVER TOO EARLY TO READ WITH YOUR BABY

BOOKS BUILD CONNECTIONS TOOLKIT



Here are some tips from doctors on reading with very young children, including the 5 Rs of early education.

When parents talk, read, and sing with their babies and toddlers, connections are formed in their young brains. These connections build language, literacy, and social-emotional skills at an important time in a young child's development. These activities strengthen the bond between parent and child. Pediatricians know this and urge parents to start reading with their babies from the start.

So what are some tips for reading with the very young?

- **Cuddle up and read with emotion.** Infants as young as a few days or weeks old can know and prefer their parents' voices and faces. Although they may not understand the words or story in a book, they will respond to the emotion in your voice and the expression on your face when you read or talk with them. They love to look at pictures with bright colors and are happiest in your arms.
- **Choose colorful and sturdy books.** As babies get older, they will reach out to hold a book and then put it into their mouths to explore it.
- **Plan a special reading time.** Active young children may lose interest in a book after only 1 to 2 minutes. So follow their lead, but keep reading, talking, and singing WITH your baby regularly and his interest and attention span will grow. Make this time special by giving your baby your full attention. Turn off the TV and computers and take a break from texting.
- **Read together every day.** As babies grow into toddlers, reading aloud together can be a very helpful routine, especially when it is part of your regular calming bedtime. Young children love having choices, so letting them pick the book to read together can be a big hit. Toddlers quickly develop favorites and may ask you to read the same story over and over, so offer choices that you like too.
- **Make time to talk about feelings.** Toddlers can point to pictures of objects (*Show me the car.*) and characters (*Which one says meow?*) in books. As their language grows, they may be able to name the pictures that you

TALK



READ



SING



FAMILY RESOURCE: Why It Is Never Too Early to Start Reading With Your Baby



point to or finish the sentences in favorite books such as *Twinkle, twinkle little... (star)*. Sometimes they even pretend to read the book themselves. Talking about the emotions characters in books are having can give you a chance to talk to young children about their own feelings, like being mad, sad, or happy.

- **Ask your child questions.** Preschoolers are often chatty, curious, and full of themselves. By this age, they can probably tell you part of the stories in their favorite books or the stories that they have imagined. As print becomes more interesting, some learn to point to letters in the alphabet or to count some of the pictures. Asking your child questions about the story (*What are the characters thinking? What might happen next?*) is a fun way for them to learn. These kinds of conversations build language, a desire to learn, and early reading skills.
- **Keep reading together, even when your child can read.** Children are never too young or too old to enjoy reading with you. When they are learning to read themselves, you can still read stories to them that are at a higher reading level than those they can read on their own. There are many great children's books. Your local librarian can help you find just the right books to enjoy during your special time reading together.

This time together has a powerful impact on children's development because it strengthens their relationships with their parents and caregivers, the most important people in their world. A great deal of research supports this statement, yet fewer than half of children younger than age 5 in the United States are read to daily. This has not changed in the past 10 years, despite recent support for early education.

Pediatricians are promoting the 5 Rs of early education with young families:

- **Reading** together as a daily, fun, family activity
- **Rhyming**, playing, talking, singing, and cuddling together often throughout the day
- Building **Routines** for meals, play, and sleep, which help children know what to expect and what is expected of them
- Giving **Rewards** for everyday successes (especially for effort toward goals like helping), understanding that praise from those closest to a child is a very potent reward
- Developing **Relationships** that are nurturing, reciprocal, purposeful, and lasting, which are the foundation of healthy early brain and child development

Pediatricians are taking a stand to spread the news that reading aloud, talking, and singing with young children are both fun and rewarding. The benefits are so clear and so important that promoting reading at young children's check-ups has become an essential part of pediatric care. Starting a daily routine of reading with young children, perhaps to settle down at bedtime, is a powerful way to build healthful habits that last a lifetime. The return on this investment is huge!





Adapted from 2014 AAP Policy Statement, *“Literacy Promotion: An Essential Component of Pediatric Primary Care Practice,”* and expanded by Pamela C High, MD, FAAP, and the AAP Council on Early Childhood, 2014

Other family resources related to early literacy and early learning include the following:

- Helping Your Child Learn to Read
- Sharing Books With Your Baby up to Age 11 Months
- Sharing Books With Your 1-Year-Old
- Sharing Books With Your 2-Year-Old
- Sharing Books With Your Preschooler
- Sharing Books With Your School-Age Child
- The Secret to a Smarter Baby

Pediatric Professional ePubs in this AAP series include the following:

- Evidence Supporting Early Literacy and Early Learning
- Finding the Right Book for Every Child
- Selecting Books for Your Program
- What Every Pediatric Professional Can Do to Promote Early Literacy and Early Learning

Please visit aap.org/literacy for further information about resources mentioned within this publication and additional resources on early literacy.

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