

Reading with your Child

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Reading is one of the best things you can do with your child. It increases their language development, sets the stage for learning, and is a fun activity. It is never too early to start reading to your child! Here are some ideas for reading with your child as they grow.

Your Newborn: Your baby is just starting to experience the world. They know the sound of your voice and the warmth of your touch. Snuggle with them and hold a board book with big, colorful pictures. Their eyes will focus briefly as you move the book around. Your baby will start to hear the emotion and rhythm of your voice. Once they start cooing, try to make an immediate response such as “you think so?” We know that babies that are read to develop higher vocabularies, and starting early gives them a head start. This also lays the foundation for making reading a part of your daily routine.

Your 6 month old: Around this age, your baby is holding their head steady and sitting up by themselves or with a little support. They will reach for a book and take it to their mouth. Board books with thick cardboard and soft cloth books are perfect for this age. They love seeing actual babies faces, and books with rhyming text. Start pointing to pictures and repeating what you see. Use books at bedtime while rocking to slowly relax your child before they go to sleep. Make sure that a day doesn't go by without a book.

Your 9 month old: Your baby is crawling, starting to pull up, babbling, and developing a wonderful pincer grasp. This is the time to start touch and feel books. Look for books with lots of different textures. Continue with rhyming books, and books with big colorful pictures. Play peek a boo with a big book and the giggles will keep you coming back for more. Announce it's story time and clap your hands and cheer. Soon your child will start clapping for more and more books.

Your one year old: Your child now has a few specific words, and is walking alone or while holding onto your hands. Some one year olds can sit quietly for multiple books, while other want you to show them a few pictures, then get up and move around. Both are normal and let your child guide you. As you are looking at books, point out lots of pictures and say things like, “there is a kitty. A kitty says meow.” Use books as part of your routine, and always have them in your diaper bag and in the car. When your child “says” anything, respond right away with words and big smiles. They still like the rhythm of rhyming books, the textures of touch and feel books, and books with big, bold pictures.

Your 18 month old: Your child is busy learning to run, scribble, talk, and perfect the temper tantrum. Their language is going to start to really take off now so READ, READ, READ! Point to body parts in books then ask questions like, “Where are your eyes?” Point out animals and name the sounds they make. Books with patterns that repeat are wonderful at this age like, “Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?”.

Your 2 year old: Your child is running, scribbling, and loving things their way. They will start to turn paper pages, but may still rip them sometimes. They can put 2 words together and start gaining words every day. Very quickly, they are in full sentences. Pick books that interest your

child such as trucks, fairies, or animals. They may want to look at the same one over and over again. Let them start to fill in words as you are reading familiar books that they have heard many times. Pick a few special, short books that you can use to end your bedtime routine, especially if your child needs that structure to know when it's time to go to sleep.

Your 3 year old: Your child is jumping, starting to draw and stringing 2-3 sentences together. A stranger can understand most of what they say. They can turn a page, one at a time and can name most familiar things- they are ready to learn! You usually can't get away with skipping pages anymore at this age. Books that show opposites (up/down, fast/slow), and books with interesting stories are great at this age. Read books with alphabet letters and books that count things to reinforce these skills.

Your 4 year old: Your child may love to tell stories and recite things from memory. Read stories that give them opportunities to do this such as "The Wheels on the Bus". They also like books where they can imagine what could happen. As you read, ask them what they think could happen next. Have different kinds of books: some with beautiful text and others with beautiful pictures and minimal text ("Hug" or "Goodnight Gorilla" come to mind). While hearing all the words builds their vocabulary, the other books allow them to use their own words to tell the story. Both are important for development. Identify letters as you read, and try to keep reading new books so they have exposure to unique words every day. Put that library card to good use!

Your 5 year old: Your child may tell a story using full sentences, print some letters, count to 10, and sing and dance. They can listen to longer stories and love to search for things on the pages. Pick books with more words, and many different kinds of characters. Help them hear different voices and emotions. Books with alliteration are often a hit, especially if it involves finding everything that starts with "k" on a given page. They have great imaginations, so find books that encourage them to imagine a different life than the one they lead.

Once your child enters school, continue to read every day. While they will start to read at school, there is still no substitute for that time they get with you at home. If you've developed a routine of reading all along, it will be a wonderful activity that neither you nor your child will want to give up. Make sure you model reading by curling up with your favorite book, magazine, or newspaper as well. When you go to the library, pick out books for both of you.

Reading is essential to your child's development. It fosters language development, sets your child up for school success, and sets them on the path to a lifelong love of learning. In addition, it is fun, relaxing and a special time to bond with your child. Grab a book, curl up on the couch and READ TO YOUR CHILD. I promise it will be time well spent.