

# A to Z's of Early Childhood

THE SCIENCE OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

## R is for Reading

### Shared Book Reading with Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers

Shared book reading between a caregiver and child has been found to have broad developmental benefits. The interactions that occur during shared book reading support brain development, social-emotional connections, and language and literacy skills. Given the benefits of shared book reading vary across different ages and developmental stages, what and how caregivers read to infants, toddlers, and preschool-age children matters. Research shows many benefits for children's language and literacy skills when caregivers read to them consistently throughout early childhood.

### Strategies for Shared Book Reading

Here are four effective strategies for shared book reading.

#### Strategy 1:

Find books that are age appropriate and interesting.

Finding the right books at the right time encourages positive experiences for infants and young children. Choose books that are relevant to the child's life and meet their interests and abilities.

#### Strategy 2:

Incorporate shared book reading into daily routines.

Spending time every day in shared book reading can increase early learning and language development, including for infants as young as 6 months of age. For older infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, caregivers can positively respond to children's interests in books and book reading by:

- Engaging in shared book reading several times a day.
- Following the child's lead about how long to read, which books to read, and how they are read.
- Focusing on making book reading an enjoyable experience that leads to positive interactions between the child and those who are sharing the reading experience.

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## Strategy 3:

### Use strategies that support language learning.

How you read to a child is as important as what you read. Use strategies that foster language development.

Research shows that **naming characters or animals** in books helps engage infants' attention. If books do not have names of characters, making up names can also help engage infants' attention. For example, you could name a picture of a duck "Mr. Waddles."

**Follow the child's focus of attention** during shared book reading to allow for embedded learning opportunities. For example, if a toddler is looking at a book, sees a red truck, and says, "truck," while pointing to the truck, you can say, "Yes, it's a red truck." This is an opportunity to learn a color name during shared book reading.

Use **"wait time."** When you or the child turns the pages of the book, wait a few seconds to see what the child does or says. Affirm what the child does or says and build on it. For example, if an older infant points to a picture of a duck on a page, you can build on their interest by saying, "Yes, that is a duck. That is Mr. Waddles."

For older toddlers and preschool-age children, **draw connections between what the child is reading and their experiences.** For example, if a child says a character in the book is feeling sad, you might say, "Yes, she is sad. Remember when you lost your toy? Did you feel sad?" These types of back-and-forth interactions are vital for building social-emotional connections and early communication and language skills.

## Strategy 4:

### Build early literacy skills.

In addition to building language skills, shared book reading can also build early literacy skills. Encouraging toddlers to explore books by holding them or turning pages out of order (according to which pages engage their attention) helps them learn print concepts.

Caregivers might ask older toddlers and preschool-age children to help them identify when words rhyme or sound the same, name letters, and identify what sound a letter makes. For example, a caregiver might say, "Hickory-dickory-dock. The mouse ran up the clock. Listen! Clock-dock. Those words rhyme! What sounds like clock and dock?" These early literacy skills are an important foundation for later literacy success.

## What We Are Doing

The Anita Zucker Center and our collaborators work to support families and practitioners to promote language and literacy development in infants and young children.

## Shared Book Reading With Infants (0-6 mos)

### Strategy 1:

Find books that are age appropriate and interesting.

- Choose books with little or no text and big, high-contrast pictures.
- Consider books with interactive parts, such as puppets, mirrors, textures, or sounds.

### Strategy 2:

Incorporate shared book reading into daily routines.

- Find a quiet and comfortable place to engage in shared book reading routines (e.g., a couch or cushioned chair).
- Read together in the same place around the same time each day (e.g., in the morning, before a nap, or bedtime).

### Strategy 3:

Use strategies that support language learning.

- Use a soft and soothing tone of voice and hold the infant close to you.
- Respond to the child's early communication during shared reading routines (e.g., widening their eyes, smiling, quieting to the sound of a caregivers' voice, kicking to show excitement, or patting the book).
- Stop the reading routine when the infant shows they need a break (e.g., looking away, arching their back, or fussing).
- Respond to what the infant looks at by labeling or describing it using one or two words (e.g., "red car").

### Strategy 4:

Build early literacy skills.

- Vary tone of voice or point to pictures in books to gain the infant's attention.
- When an infant starts to explore books through their sense of sight or touch, describe what they are doing (e.g., "You see the water."; "You are patting the bunny.").