

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 Children 2 to 3 Years Old

Strategy 1:

Find books that are age appropriate and interesting.

- Introduce books with paper pages and an engaging plot.
- Look for books with more detailed illustrations.

Strategy 2:

Incorporate shared book reading into daily routines.

- Incorporate shared reading during different parts of the daily routines (e.g., just after mealtimes or right before bed).
- Include the child in different parts of the routine (e.g., putting the book back on the shelf) to build their independence.
- Find a quiet and comfortable place to engage in shared book reading routines. Create a small, quiet place near a play area for the child to read alone or with others.

Strategy 3:

Use strategies that support language learning.

- Gesture, point to, and name pictures in the book and encourage the child to do the same. For example, when reading a story about the beach you might take turns naming things you see (e.g., "I see a red shovel.>").
- Make comments and ask questions about objects in the books that the child sees in their environments, such as construction vehicles or a jug of milk (e.g., "They are buying milk at the store. What do we buy at the store?"). At this age children are trying to make sense of the world around them.
- Respond to the child's communication when they point to or name objects in the book by labeling, repeating, and expanding on them (e.g., if the child points to a picture and says, "Swim water!" Say, "Yes, she is swimming! We swim at the beach.>").

Strategy 4:

Build early literacy skills.

- Support children to communicate about why something happened or how they know something about the characters or the story plot (e.g., "How does he feel?", "What is she doing?").
- Make connections between the book and the child's life (e.g., "He has a bike. You have a bike too!").
- Encourage children to pretend to read by pointing to the pictures and words and talking about what they see or by holding the book and turning the pages independently.
- Help them identify when words rhyme or sound the same. For example, you may pause for the child to complete the sentence of a familiar rhyme (e.g., "Hickory-dickory-dock. The mouse ran up the ____").
- Help children to orient books upright and to name familiar letters. For example, "Look, the letter H. H is the first letter in hippo! Can you find another H?"
- Help children notice and name letters in their environment, such as, "I see a red stop sign. Look, it starts with the letter S. What others?"