

# 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 4 to 5 Years Old

### Strategy 1:

Find books that are age appropriate and interesting.

- Introduce concept books that teach new skills (e.g., counting, numbers, feelings, maps, or letters) to help expand children's language.
- Find books that address social-emotional development in an age-appropriate way (e.g., feeling scared on the first day of school or excited about a birthday).

### Strategy 2:

Incorporate shared book reading into daily routines.

- As the child's routines change, adjust the shared reading routine to match the new schedule (e.g., if bedtime is later, try shared reading after dinner instead).
- 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. Encourage the child to look at books independently or with others (e.g., a sibling or a pet).

### Strategy 3:

Use strategies that support language learning.

- Have simple conversations about what you see in the book. For example, if you are looking at a page with a picture of a fire engine you may say, "What is this?" while pointing to the fire truck. The child says, "a red fire truck." Then say, "That's right; it's a red fire truck. What does the fire truck do?"
- Stay positive, be expressive, and use positive feedback. For example, if you ask, "What is that animal?" A child may answer, "A fish." Then you could respond, "Yes! That IS a fish, it's yellow and brown!" This supportive feedback and expansion of language (yellow, brown) will encourage children's engagement and language development.
- Teach words with a simple definition, real-life examples, and opportunities to practice. For example, "Here is a new word: explore. Explore means to look around a new place and learn about it. In this story, the lion explores the zoo. You explore a new playground. Remember, explore means to look around a new place and learn about it."
- Support reading for comprehension. At this age, children start to enjoy books with plots. For example, when reading a book about a boy who thought he lost his blanket because he left it at preschool, ask the child, "Did the boy really lose his blanket or did something else happen?"

## Shared Book Reading With Children 4 to 5 Years Old

### Strategy 4:

Build early literacy skills.

- Discuss the letters, sounds, and words in the book. Focus on letters that are most meaningful for the child, such as the letters in their name. Teach letter names and letter sounds. For example, if you see the word 'tiger' in a book, say, "This says tiger. T - tiger, like your name Timothy." "What else do you see that starts with T?"
- Make connections between the book and the child's life (e.g., "Biscuit is sad. Have you felt sad before? What made you feel sad?").
- Help children to make predictions about what they think will happen next. For example, "He broke the window. What do you think he will do now?"
- Encourage children to pretend to "read" by pointing to the pictures and retelling the events of the story in their own words.
- Help them identify when words rhyme or sound the same. For example, you might say, "Hickory-dickory-dock. The mouse ran up the clock. Listen! Clockdock. Those words rhyme! What other words sound like clock and dock?"