

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 (7-12 mos)

Strategy 1:

Find books that are age appropriate and interesting.

- Offer board books with short, simple pictures or phrases and colorful illustrations.
- Try books with rhymes and phrases that repeat.

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).
- Reread stories or picture books that the infant seems to prefer or recognize (e.g., by reaching, widening their eyes, or expressing excitement by kicking arms or legs or making sounds).

Strategy 3:

Use strategies that support language learning.

- Act out what you read with your face, hands, and voice.
- Follow the child's focus of attention. For example, if the child is looking at a picture or touching a picture, label the picture.
- Name the characters in books. If the book does not have names for the characters, you can simply make them up (e.g., "Mr. Wiggles"). Label different objects or pictures in the book.
- Move the infant's arms and legs gently along with the actions in the story (e.g., if the book says, "run," wiggle the infant's leg up and down).

Strategy 4:

Build early literacy skills.

- Allow the infant to explore books using their senses. For example, they may hold or mouth a board book or cloth book. They might push a button to activate a sound or they might touch different textures in a book.
- Sing rhymes or simple finger-play songs that go along with pictures in a book (e.g., "Itsy-bitsy Spider" or "Pat-a-Cake") and encourage the child to participate by vocalizing or moving their limbs.