

Reading books with babies and toddlers

Once your baby is more interested in the world around him, it is the perfect time to make books a regular part of your day together. The first—and best—tip for sharing books with babies is to have fun together. When book reading is a positive experience, it makes children want to keep exploring books as they grow.

Here are ideas for reading with your baby as well as toddlers:

A Few Minutes at a Time is OK. And don't worry if you don't finish the story. Babies and even toddlers may only sit for a few minutes for a story. As they grow, they will be able to sit and listen longer. Let your child decide how much (or how little) time you spend reading. If your child starts to wiggle or fuss, it may be that she is ready to take a break. Or, you may find that your child has a favourite page or even a favourite picture. She may want to linger there for a while and then switch books or activities.

Get Mouthy. For now, your baby might just want to gum and mouth the book. That's okay. Let her chew on chunky board books or soft fabric or rubber books to her heart's content. When you let your child explore books in the ways that interest her, you make reading a positive experience. Plus, at this age, your baby simply doesn't understand that books are for reading, not mouthing. For a 7-month-old, books *are* for mouthing.

Talk or Sing About the Pictures. You don't have to read the words to tell a story. Just tell your own story using the pictures. Hearing you talk helps your baby learn words. When your child is a toddler, you can even ask him to "read" the pictures to you.

Let Children Turn the Pages. Babies can't yet turn pages on their own, but they might like to grab and swat at them. That's okay—your baby is figuring out how a book "works." When your child is older, encourage her to turn the pages. Page turning calls for coordinating the muscles in her fingers, the very same muscles that she will use to write later on.

Make the Story Come Alive. Create different voices for the characters in the story. Act out the story, too. If you are reading about a train chugging down the track, move your knees up and down so your baby feels the "clickety clack" movement. You can also use puppets—bought or homemade—to tell a story from a book or one that you have made up.

Make It Personal. Talk about your own family, pets, or community when you are reading a story. After you read *Wheels on the Bus*, you can show your baby the city bus as it zooms by.

Talk Together About the Story. Use the story to have a back-and-forth conversation with your child. Even for babies who aren't yet talking, you can ask: *Where is the moon? Do you see it up there in the sky?* Then you can point to the moon in the picture. Through interactions like these, babies learn new words and ideas.

Make Your Own Books. Make photo books of family members. Cut pictures from magazines or catalogs to make word books.

Use Books in Your Daily Routines. When books are part of your everyday lives, your baby will see reading as a pleasure and a gift. Try reading together during:

- **Meal Times**

Sing or read a story as you nurse your baby. Or gather all the kids, from babies on up, to enjoy a story around the breakfast table.

- **Child Care Drop-Off**

Calm a crying child with a favorite story or lullaby. Leave a photo book with pictures of loved ones at child care so your child can flip through it when she is missing you.

- **Grocery Shopping**

Clip a cloth or rubber book to the shopping cart so your baby can look at it or mouth it while you shop. When your baby is older, make a "shopping list book" with pictures of common foods (milk, eggs, orange juice, apples, etc.) that your toddler can look at and match with the items in the aisles.

- **Nap Time and Bedtime**

Familiar routines always help babies calm down. Use books and stories to quietly ease your baby to sleep.

- **Bath Time**

Rubber bath time books are great fun and may help a fussy baby enjoy the tub a little more. There are even bath time books that play a song when you press a button.