

Infants and Toddlers

BIRTH THROUGH AGE 2



WHAT TO DO AT HOME

Talking to and reading to infants and toddlers are two good ways to prepare them for later success in reading.

Talk to your child

1. **Begin talking and singing to your child from birth.** Your baby loves hearing your voice. Play peek-a-boo and pat-a-cake. Recite nursery rhymes or other verses that have strong rhythms and repeated sounds. Sing lullabies and other songs.
2. **Let your baby know that you hear her babbles, coos, and gurgles.** Repeat the sounds she makes. Smile back. When you respond to her sounds, she learns that what she “says” means something and is important to you. Sometimes, you can supply the language for her.

PARENT TALK

When your baby stretches her arm toward her bottle and says, “ga-ga-ga,” say, “Oh, you’re ready for some more milk? Here’s your milk. Isn’t it good!”

3. **Play simple touching and talking games together.** These games help a child learn what different parts of the body are called.

PARENT TALK

Ask “Where are your toes?” Then touch your child’s toes and say, “Here are your toes!” Repeat several times, then switch to fingers or ears or eyes or the nose.

4. **Point to familiar objects and name them.** When a child hears an object called the same name over and over, he learns to connect the spoken word with its meaning.

PARENT TALK

*"Here's your blanket. Your very favorite blanket.
What a nice, soft blanket!"*

5. **When your child begins to speak, build his language.** A child starts talking by using single words and short sentences. You can help by filling in missing words and using complete sentences.

PARENT TALK

*Child: "Cookie."
Parent: "Oh, you want another cookie? OK, you can have just one more."
Child: "Go car."
Parent: "Yes, we're all going to go in the car.
But first, you have to put on your coat."*

6. **Encourage your child to talk with you.** Ask questions that show you are interested in what she thinks and says. Ask her to share ideas and events that are important to her. Ask her questions that require her to talk, rather than just to give yes or no answers. Listen carefully to what she says.

PARENT TALK

*"What would you like to do next?"
"What do you suppose made that big noise?"*

7. **Answer your child's questions.** Listen to your child's questions and answer them patiently. Take time to explain things to him as completely as you can. Keep answering questions that your child asks again and again, because children learn from hearing things over and over.

Read to your child

1. **Make reading a pleasure.** Read to your child in a comfortable place. Have her sit on your lap or next to you so that she can see and point to the print and the pictures. Show her that reading is fun and rewarding.
2. **Show enthusiasm as you read with your child.** Read the story with expression. Make it more interesting by talking as the characters would talk, making sound effects, and making expressions with your face and hands. When children enjoy being read to, they will grow to love books and be eager to learn to read them.
3. **Read to your child often.** Set aside special times for reading each day, maybe after lunch and at bedtime. The more you can read to him, the better—as long as he is willing to listen. Reading times can be brief, about 5 to 10 minutes.

READING TOGETHER

Even six-week-old babies like the feeling of closeness when a parent, grandparent, or other caretaker reads to them. When children find out that reading with a loving adult can be a warm, happy experience, they begin to build a lifelong love of reading.

Reading aloud also helps children learn specific things about reading and words.

- **About books**—how to hold them. How to turn the pages one at a time. How books have words and pictures to help tell the story.
- **About print**—there is a difference between words and the pictures. You read words and look at pictures.
- **About words**—every word has a meaning. There are always new words to learn.
- **About book language**—sometimes book language sounds different from everyday conversation.
- **About the world**—there are objects, places, events, and situations that they have not heard about before.

GOOD BOOKS FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS

- Board books are made from heavy cardboard with a plastic coating. The pages are easy for very young children to turn. Board books are sturdy and can stand hard wear by babies, who tend to throw them, crawl over them, and chew them. Board books can be wiped clean.
- Cloth books, which are printed on cloth, are soft, strong, and washable.
- Touch-and-feel books invite children to explore them with their fingers. They contain objects with different textures or contain holes or pages of different shapes.
- Interactive books have flaps that lift or other parts that move. Toddlers love them, but these books tend not to hold up well under rough treatment.
- Books with interesting language, rhythm, and sounds such as books with rhymes, songs, and poetry.
- Books with predictable patterns and repeated language such as those that retell traditional nursery rhymes or songs.

4. **Talk with your child as you read together.** Comment about what's happening in the story. Point to pictures and talk about what's happening in them. When your child is ready, have him tell you about the pictures.

PARENT TALK

"See the cat under the tree?"

"Look, the family is getting into a car. I wonder where they're going?"

"What's happening on this page?"

5. **Encourage your child to explore books.** Give your baby sturdy books to look at, touch, and hold. Allow her to turn the pages, look through the holes, or lift the flaps. As your child grows older, keep books on low shelves or in baskets where she can see them and get them herself. Encourage her to look through the books and talk about them. She may talk about the pictures. She may "pretend" to read a book that she has heard many times. Or, she may **pretend read** based only on the pictures.
6. **Read favorite books again and again.** Your child will probably ask you to read favorite books many times. You might get tired of reading the same books, but children love hearing the same stories again. And it helps them learn to read by hearing familiar words and seeing what they look like in print.

WHAT CHILDREN SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO BY AGE 3

The following is a list of accomplishments that you can expect for your child by age 3. This list is based on research in the fields of reading, early childhood education, and child development. Remember, though, that children don't develop and learn at the same pace and in the same way. Your child may be more advanced or need more help than others in her age group. You are, of course, the best judge of your child's abilities and needs. You should take the accomplishments as guidelines and not as hard-and-fast rules.

A three-year-old child:

- Likes reading with an adult on a regular basis
- Listens to stories from books and stories that you tell
- Recognizes a book by its cover
- Pretends to read books
- Understands that books are handled in certain ways
- Looks at pictures in a book and knows that they stand for real objects
- Says the name of objects in books
- Comments on characters in books
- Asks an adult to read to him or to help him write
- May begin paying attention to print such as letters in names
- Begins to tell the difference between drawing and writing
- Begins to scribble as a way of writing, making some forms that look like letters

The main sources for this list of accomplishments are Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children and Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children. For more information about these sources, see Bibliography at the end of this booklet.