

25 Tips for Sharing Books with Babies and Young Toddlers

- 1 Begin reading to your child while she is in the womb! Research shows that babies respond at birth to their mother's voice, especially when they hear a familiar book being read.
- 2 Hold your child on your lap when sharing a book, and hold the book eight to ten inches from his face (not your face), because a baby's vision is fuzzy. When you hold the book this way, your child can see it but won't be able to hit the book or chew it. Also consider giving him a toy or rattle to keep his hands busy.
- 3 Place books in the crib for your young toddler to look at. Or lay your baby on a blanket on the floor, open a book wide, and place it on the floor at a comfortable distance from her.
- 4 When sharing a book, it's normal for a baby to look around and not at the book, grab the book, chew on it, hit it, turn the pages at the wrong time, and so forth. If you feel your child is genuinely unhappy, though, stop and try at another time.
- 5 Chewing on a book is actually an early learning experience, as the baby is trying to discover what the object is, what it feels like, and what it tastes like. Exploring the object and touching it are beginning steps in book handling behaviors.
- 6 Share cloth or vinyl books during the first six months, as these books are washable and a baby can pick them up. Then move on to board books with heavy cardboard pages; eventually your baby will want to try turning the pages, and this will be easier with a board book than a cloth book. Share board books with rounded edges (not pointed edges) until the child is comfortable with books with paper pages—around two years of age.

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- 7 For the first five or six months of life, choose books with bright primary colors and books with definite contrasts between dark and light to help a baby's developing vision.
- 8 Pick books that show familiar objects—ideally one object on each page for babies, and two or three objects on each page for toddlers. After naming the object, talk about it in a sentence, if possible.
- 9 Choose books that show a variety of faces, ages, and ethnic groups.
- 10 Pick some books that have different textures to touch and feel, sounds, flaps to lift, and other interactive elements. These books with sensory experiences help create more connections in the brain. (To help flap books last longer, reinforce the flaps with tape on the hinge before sharing them with a baby the first time.)
- 11 Share books with nursery rhymes, lullabies, and songs. Babies' ears are very sensitive to the rhythmic sounds of language.
- 12 Ask a librarian to suggest safe and developmentally appropriate books for your child. Some old favorites have illustrations in light pastel colors and interactive items that are not well-attached to the pages, which could cause choking hazards.
- 13 Pick a quiet time when sharing a book will be a pleasant experience. Don't force it if your child clearly does not want to cuddle up with a book at the moment.
- 14 You don't need to read the whole book, or all the words on a page. It's fine to just open a book, point to the pictures, and talk about them. You can also share wordless books by making up a story to go along with the pictures on the pages. When your child can talk, these books are ideal for her to add words and eventually tell the story.
- 15 Around 12 months, there's nothing better than a lift-the-flap book! Your child is beginning to understand "object permanence"—the idea that things still exist even when he can't see them. Flap books are like peekaboo games, and will make your young toddler laugh.

- 16** For young toddlers, pick books that have just one or two lines of text on a page. At this age you can share books with more than one object or image on each page, but steer clear of a cluttered look.
- 17** Repetition is important. Read a favorite book again and again, anytime your child asks for it. Occasionally run your finger under recurring words. Toddlers will begin to learn that those squiggles mean something!
- 18** If you share color, counting, or ABC books, read for enjoyment, not to teach your child skills.
- 19** Toddlers like books with familiar objects, familiar characters, repetitive phrases, rhyme or verse, animals making sounds, and familiar songs. You can also start sharing folktales or traditional tales. Ask your librarian to recommend shortened versions of folktales and traditional stories rather than longer—or scarier—versions.
- 20** If your young toddler wanders away while you are reading a book, keep reading for a bit. He may come back or continue to listen while playing with a toy. If it is obvious that he's not interested, put the book away and try again at another time.
- 21** Pick books you like, and share them enthusiastically! Use different voices, and make the sounds that are mentioned in the book. When your child is able, have her help turn the pages.
- 22** Book reading can take place several times during the day, even if for just a few minutes at a time.
- 23** Put a few books near your child's toys so that he will see them and want to play with them.
- 24** Take books along to share when you know you will be sitting in a waiting room or waiting in a line somewhere.
- 25** When grandparents, relatives, or friends ask for suggestions for birthday or other gifts, recommend books!