

7 Days • 7 Ways

To Parents and Caregivers:

Try to do each one of these seven core activities every day—a few minutes at a time, at different times of the day. If you miss a day, don't worry! Just try later or continue the next day.

1. Share Books
2. Share Sounds
3. Share Words
4. Share Rhymes
5. Share Songs
6. Share Stories
7. Share Playtime



Share Books

- Research shows that reading books to children from birth and having books present in the home are two of the greatest indicators for later success in learning to read.
- Choose books appropriate for babies and young toddlers. (Ask your librarian for suggestions!)
- Talk about the pictures, point to words from time to time, and eventually let your child help turn the pages.
- When your child can speak, ask simple “what” questions about the book.
- Try to read several books at different times during the day. It does not matter if you finish the book.
- If you are reading a book and your young toddler wanders away to play with a toy, keep reading a little longer. Often the child is still listening and may come back to look at the book.
- When your child is able, let her pick out the books for you to share.
- Always have books available and within your child's reach. Accept that there will be wear and tear until your baby learns how to take care of and use a book.
- Teaching babies and young toddlers to read with flashcards or other such methods is not developmentally appropriate and is not recommended. This may actually hinder future success.
- Make sure all of your reading experiences are fun for your child. If he is not enjoying himself, stop and try again at another time.

Share Sounds

- Listen to the sounds your baby makes, and imitate them or respond with a smile.
- “Mama” and “dada” are among the first sounds a baby makes. Acknowledge your baby’s babble, and encourage more by engaging in babble-friendly conversation. (Mama and Dada will become actual words sometime around your baby’s first birthday.)
- Often there is a rhythm to the sounds your baby makes, and she may repeat the rhythmic sounds like a melody. Sing along with your baby once you detect the rhythm and sounds. This is a great way to communicate with her.
- Make different sounds and have your child repeat them. Make sure your baby can see your mouth and how you are making the sound.
- Hearing the smaller sounds in words helps your child with phonological awareness, a skill he’ll need to learn to read when he enters school.
- Exaggerate sounds you make when expressing feelings such as “uh-oh!” or “whoopee!”
- Play games with your young toddler, such as “What sound does this animal make?” Animal sounds are some of the first sounds young toddlers can make.
- Sing songs that play with language, such as Raffi’s “Apples and Bananas” or Jim Gill’s “Jim Gill Sings Do, Re, Mi on His Toe, Leg, Knee.”
- Make up silly songs or raps with silly syllable combinations. Have children clap to the sounds.
- All babies, no matter what their native language is, make similar sounds when they babble and coo. It’s not until the age of six months or so that they start to make sounds specific to their home language.

Share Words

- Try to introduce a few new words to your child every day. Simply say the new word and explain it briefly.

- Share language while you go about doing your everyday activities and during your baby’s daily routines.
- Talk to your baby during interactions with her, such as diapering or feeding.
- Talk to your baby about what he is seeing, hearing, touching, and doing throughout the day.
- Play naming games with your young toddler. Ask her, “Where is your . . .,” naming a body part, and repeat the question with other body parts. Do the same with objects such as clothing, food, toys, furniture, and so on, and she will begin to learn the words.
- When reading an illustrated book with, for example, a picture of a bird, ask your child, “What color is the bird? What is the bird doing in the picture?”
- Provide experiences for your child that will introduce new words, such as going to a zoo, going to a farm, and taking walks outside. Point out all the animals and objects that you see. Have your child repeat the new words she learns.
- Expand your child’s vocabulary by describing objects that interest him. For example, if he points to a dog, instead of saying “a dog,” say “a big white dog with brown spots.”
- When you are at a store, the post office, a park, or any other public place, point to the words on signs and read the words aloud to your child.
- Speak to your child in your native language. This way you’ll be able to provide her with a rich vocabulary. She will learn to translate these words into other languages later.

Share Rhymes

- Sharing rhymes can establish a pleasurable bond between you and your baby.
- Rhymes do not need to make sense to your child. He will simply enjoy the sounds of the words.

- Recite or sing familiar nursery rhymes with your child. You can also read rhymes from nursery rhyme collections or individual nursery rhyme books.
- Make up silly rhymes, and act them out or dance with your child while reciting them.
- Share lap rhymes, hand and finger rhymes, toe and foot rhymes, and bounce rhymes throughout the day. Many good books with these rhymes are available. Ask a librarian.
- Repeat the rhymes often. When your child begins to speak, pause and let him supply an occasional word.
- Clap on your baby's palm while singing or saying a nursery rhyme, one clap for each syllable.
- Make sure to include some of the old favorite rhymes: "Pat-a-Cake," "This Little Piggy," "To Market, to Market," "Eye Winker, Tom Tinker," and "Trot Trot to Boston."
- Make up simple motions that you and your child can do when reciting rhymes so that she can participate.
- Point out rhyming word pairs as you read rhymes to your child, but don't expect him to recognize these pairs yet. Children are usually quite a bit older than 24 months before they are able to pair rhyming words.

Share Songs

- Sing to your child! The quality of your voice is unimportant. Your child will not care.
- Sing songs throughout the day—they can be songs you know or that you make up. For example, the tune to "Here We Go 'Round the Mulberry Bush" is easily adapted: "This is the way we brush your hair..." Other good tunes for adapting are "Mary Had a Little Lamb," "The Farmer in the Dell," and "London Bridge Is Falling Down."
- Sing songs at a normal speed, then sing them slowly so that your child can clearly hear the words and perhaps even the syllables that make up the words in the songs. This will improve his ability to discriminate sounds, which is a skill necessary for learning to read.

- While singing a song, have your baby play a simple instrument like a rattle or wrist bells (jingle bells attached to ribbon or elastic band).
- Find some songs your child likes, and designate one as the "waking up" song and another as the "going to bed" song. Babies and young toddlers thrive on routines.
- Ask your librarian for baby board books that are based on songs you can sing.
- Sing old favorites: "If You're Happy and You Know It," "Baa, Baa, Black Sheep," "Itsy, Bitsy Spider," and "The Wheels on the Bus."
- Singing the same songs over and over again (just like repeated readings of familiar books) helps your young toddler learn the words and builds memory skills.
- Play lullabies at bedtime. It's a good way to calm babies down, and it also serves as a signal that it's time for bed. Turn the music off as your child prepares to go to sleep, so that she doesn't become dependent on it for sleep.

Share Stories

- You do not have to read a book to tell a good story! Make up stories about what you are doing during the day or about something that happened to your child. Make up stories about things you see while riding in a car or walking to a location.
- Use your child's favorite baby doll or stuffed animal to act out stories that you have made up or read in books.
- When your child speaks, ask her simple "what" and "how" questions so that she has an opportunity to tell a story.
- While looking at family photos, tell stories about family members.
- Make homemade books for your child. Glue different fabrics to sheets of cardboard, and clip the "pages" together with binder rings to make a

touch-and-feel book. Place magazine pictures (or photographs) in resealable plastic bags and staple the bags together at the bottom to make a “baggie book.” Cover the staples with plastic tape to make a safe binding. Use these homemade books to make up your own stories.

- Make up stories about things you see while taking a walk with your child. For example, tell a story about a bird or squirrel family you see in the yard or the park.
- Share simple wordless books with your child, telling the story you see in the illustrations. Ask a librarian for suggestions of wordless books for very young children.
- At the end of the day, make up a story about the events of the day, calling it “(Name’s) Story.” Children love to hear stories about themselves.

Share Playtime

- Sit down and play with your child several times a day. This is never a waste of time. It creates a special bond between you and your child and helps your child acquire confidence, plus it fosters creativity and imagination in your child.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics discourages any television viewing for children under the age of two, and recommends lots of interactive play with you and others instead.
- Cover your baby’s toys with a blanket for an easy game of peekaboo or hide-and-seek.
- Provide play experiences and materials that allow your child to use his five senses, such as water, sand, play dough, and so on.
- Playtime does not necessarily mean toys. It can mean pots and pans, spoons, dropping clothespins in and out of a container—many household items make fun, safe playthings.
- Provide opportunities for small motor activities, such as playing with blocks, alphabet letters, or puzzles with two or three pieces.
- Provide paper and large crayons for your child to scribble. Scribbling is the first step to forming letters and eventually writing.
- Blow bubbles in as many ways as possible—through jar rings, straws, or the top of a salt shaker, for example.
- If you place books near your child’s toys, she might opt for a story along with playtime. Find some books that are fun to play with, such as flap books or other books with movable parts.
- Encourage pretend play. It enriches vocabulary, enhances creativity, and helps children learn concepts. Provide props such as dress-up clothing, tea sets, stuffed animals, crowns, and so on. Act out a story, host a tea party, have a fashion show, crown a princess, or organize the zoo. The possibilities are endless!
- Toy safety should always be a concern. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission has a published guide for suitable toys online. (A librarian can help you find this.)