

## ARTICLE

### Reading with Joy

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Reading with children can be so much more than the words on the page. When caregivers read aloud to babies and toddlers with playfulness and fun, children find the reading more engaging. Reading in this way also promotes language development and helps prepare young children for reading, developing their [early literacy](#).

Taking delight and expressing joy when reading picture books to young children can be a wonderful way to interact and promote “[joint or shared attention](#),” which is an important communication skill. Joint attention can happen when the caregiver and child share focus on the same object. Storybook reading is a great way to support learning this skill early.

Caregivers can interact by pointing at the pictures, making sounds such as saying “Moo, moo,” and waiting for the child to respond. For example, when reading ask the child to point to the picture of a cat, and say, “Show me the cat.” Reading in this way builds children’s understanding of words and their meanings. Increase interaction by encouraging young children to imitate the words in the book (e.g., “Look at the cat. Now you say Cat”) and let them hold the book and turn the pages.

Be aware that very young children often turn pages back and forth instead of starting at the beginning of the book and progressing to the end – and that’s okay! You can respond by saying something like, “Oh you want to see the bear again? There she is!” Keep in mind that the goal for very young children is to give them opportunities to enjoy books with you; they will gradually understand how to read a book from front to back. You can also increase your child’s engagement by changing your tone of voice with different characters and events in the story.

Reading the same book over and over also supports children with recalling words and growing their literacy and learning. Young children love reading the same book because they thrive with repetition and routines.

When choosing storybooks, it can be helpful for caregivers to ask:

- Will the child find this book interesting?
- Is the book limited to a few lines of text? Infants and toddlers love colorful illustrations.
- Does the book have interesting words to grow their vocabulary? It is so beneficial for babies and toddlers to hear lots of words.
- Does the book offer rhymes and word plays?

To get more of those smiles during storybook reading, caregivers can choose board or cloth books for babies. Infants and toddlers typically like books that have few words and that have simple rhymes or are predictable. When reading with toddlers who are 12 to 24 months, consider reading books that have photos of families or familiar activities. As toddlers get older, they may enjoy reading books with a problem or situation to overcome, or stories that include cause and effect.

Stories and smiles can also occur during everyday moments. When caregivers change diapers or during mealtimes, take the time to tell a story. You can also tell stories about events that happened that day. Taking moments throughout your day to read or tell stories will support children's learning and can bring lots of smiles.

## References

Grolig, L. (2020). Shared storybook reading and oral language development: A Bioecological perspective. *Frontiers in Psychology, 11*, 1818. DOI=10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01818.

## Some helpful resources

- **Teaching Strategies for Early Childhood Education:**

- **Reading aloud with infants, toddlers & twos**

- Relationships are at the heart of language and literacy learning. In this quick read-aloud tip Kai-leé Berke shares strategies for reading with our youngest learners...

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXC5jJzotSQ>

- **Highlights for Grown-Ups:**

- **How to read to babies | Why should I read to my baby?**

- Reading aloud is one of the best gifts you can give your baby. It's fun, free, and among the most effective ways to inspire your little one to become a lifelong reader...

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uY3O96iv8w>