



Helping kids grow healthier brains.

123connectwithme.org

ARTICLE

Read To Me

Article authored by:

Holly Hatton-Bowers, PhD, UNL & Julia Torquati, PhD, UNL

“P-l-a-y” my daughter sounds out the words. “Play, it says play mommy!” Her eyes light up and she beams with excitement to have learned another word. One of my favorite activities is reading to my daughter. From before she was born I would read short stories to her. Now she is 6-years old and loves our nightly routine of having me read to her, which we have been doing since she was an infant. She also enjoys going to the library and picking out storybooks. As a parent, it is such a joy to read to her and now she also reads to me.

Reading to children at any age is beneficial for their developing minds and it can be a fun way to learn. It grows their curiosity and they learn listening skills, phonemic awareness, and reading to your child increases their vocabulary.

Reading to young children is also great for bonding and supporting positive relationships. It can be a nice way to slow down and connect with your child. You do not have to worry about reading the entire storybook. Let your child turn the pages of the book. They may want to go back to the beginning of the story and that’s ok. It is most important that your child is having fun and that reading to them is a positive experience.

So what are some ways to read to young children? When reading storybooks, change the pitch of your voice to become different characters and playfully talk about the pictures. When reading to babies they may want to explore the book by putting it in their mouths or practice turning pages back and forth. A toddler may want to move their bodies and toddle around while you read. If they do, that is perfectly fine as they are still benefiting from you reading to them. You can also sing the words of the story. It can be fun to read books that repeat phrases and rhyme, like *Is Your Mama a Llama?* by Deborah Guarino. Young children typically like books with rhymes, repetition, and rhythm.

For babies, it can be helpful to choose children’s books with bright and bold colors and images. For children who are 12-18 months, they like to read books about everyday experiences and that have simple text. Toddlers may like having you read books with characters or that include cause-and-effect stories. Preschoolers may start enjoying storybooks with more text and many like it when you start asking them open-ended questions, such as, “What do you think will



Helping kids grow healthier brains.

123connectwithme.org

happen next?" You can also connect the story to what is happening in your child's life. Sometimes it is enjoyable to look at the pictures in a book and make up a story together.

Look for other opportunities to read to your child too. When you are at the grocery store you can read the words on a sign or on food packages. If you go out to eat, read the words on the menu. Preschool-aged children are very proud of themselves when they begin to recognize letters and words on street signs, and you can encourage them by making it a game to look for signs with a specific letter or word.

If you are unsure how to start reading to your child, ask your pediatrician for some reading tips and go to your local library. The library is a wonderful way to make an adventure of finding storybooks and having books to read to your child as a fun daily routine. Librarians can also offer some tips and ideas for reading to young children so that it is engaging and supports their learning.

So start today! Soon your child will be asking, "Will you read to me?"

Additional Resources:

- <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/1285-supporting-language-and-literacy-skills-from-12-24-months>
- <https://raisingchildren.net.au/babies/play-learning/literacy-reading-stories/reading-storytelling>
- It's never too early to start reading with your infants and toddlers! Here are some simple suggestions for types of books for your youngest readers and how to connect with your child during reading time. More details are available at this link <https://mediahub.unl.edu/media/12665>
- Ece Demir-Lira, Ö., Applebaum, L.R., Goldin-Meadow, S., & Levine, S.C. (2019). Parents' early book reading to children: Relation to children's later language and literacy outcomes controlling for other parent language input. *Developmental Science*, 22(3), e12764. doi: 10.1111/desc.12764.