

Brain Development: Sharing books with infants and toddlers

Babies and toddlers need books much the way they need food. Reading to even the youngest babies helps their brains grow. Connections in the brain are stimulated and strengthened by the repetition of the pictures and your words. Brain imaging shows that the brain of an infant or toddler becomes very active when an adult shares a book by reading aloud.

At first, babies are interested in *exploring* and enjoy manipulating the book. Follow your baby's lead by allowing the exploration while describing what the baby is doing. You do not

have to actually read the book at this stage. It is most important to enjoy the book together.

Next comes the *attentive stage* where you will notice less manipulating of the book and more attention to the pictures and your words. Babies will begin to hand you books to share. Often babies will have a favorite page or book.



For Babies:

- Vinyl books and cardboard books with simple pictures work best.
- Allow your baby to mouth and explore the book at will.
- Hold your baby in your lap and tap the pages of a book to get attention.
- When the baby is on her tummy, prop an open book with bright pictures in front her.
- Books with photo pictures of faces and other babies are especially appealing.

For Creepers:

- Creepers like to turn pages, so cardboard and chunky books are good to share.
- Continue to follow your child's lead in how to share the book together.
- Choose books with animal pictures. Your baby will enjoy hearing you make animal sounds.



For Toddlers:

- Books with rhyming words and repeated phrases are fun to share. The repetition encourages brain connections for language.
- Toddlers react to pictures and will begin to point to familiar pictures.
- Respond when your child asks, "What's this?"
- Encourage your toddler to point to the picture when you ask "where's the cat?" Also enjoy books without it being a questions and answer session.
- Toddlers enjoy the same books over and over.
 - Follow your toddler's lead with the book. Some toddlers like to stand and listen rather than sitting on your lap.
 - Make sharing books with your child as part of your daily routine especially at naptime and bedtime.

