



A+ Ideas for Reading to Your Baby or Toddler

Read aloud together. It helps your infant to hear your voice. Lie on the bed quietly with your baby and read aloud. In the early months it does not even need to be a children's book; it could be a computer manual. Your voice and your emotion matter.

Zip through lots of books together. With your baby or toddler on your lap, "cruise" the mail, magazines, newspaper, and books. Turn pages fast, point to what is interesting (remember, you are the model), and also let toddlers point to what interests them.

Choose baby books with simple, familiar images. For first readers (8-14 mos.) choose cloth or cardboard books with large, simple pictures of items babies might see around them. Babies really like to see other babies, animals, and items they use or play with.

Animate the pictures in baby books. Do not read the words in the book. Instead, make noises for animals, squeals for babies, act out brushing teeth ("brush, brush, brush"). If your baby tries to copy your noises, encourage this. Soon your baby may "read" to himself/herself, using noises or actions for what he or she sees.

Have children's books around. Keep books in the toy box. Baby books are easy to find at the library or in drug stores or grocery stores. You can also make books which babies like by drawing or pasting pictures on cardboard. Toddlers like to help you make these books. Keep a book in your child's bed and a book near the car seat.

Use words toddlers know and can say. Identify people in books, using names of people toddlers know. ("She is like Mommy. He is like Daddy. Baby is like you!")

Wait for your child to read with you. As you identify pictures, pause for a bit and see if your child will try to say the word too. If he or she wants to join in and tell you more about the pictures, wait and let your child add some ideas. Be adaptable: don't worry about what the story actually says.

It is OK to jump around in a book. Often children want to hurry to the end or see a picture they love. It is good to let children look ahead to see what they like and then go back to see more of the pictures. Often the story is not important to the child.

Read the same book over. This may be boring for parents, but children become attached to certain books. Having the familiar pictures and a story they know is a form of balance and equilibrium for them. Some books become part of a routine, such as a bedtime story, or a story that Grandma always reads. Reading is play that leads to love.