



# TOOLS for TODDLERS

Helping Babies and Toddlers get a **Strong Start**



## Using Books to Develop Preliteracy Skills in Babies and Toddlers

Literacy is defined as the ability to read and write. Preliteracy skills are the early skills associated with successful reading development. They encompass a wide range of abilities such as awareness of books, developing rhythm and rhyme, being able to discriminate sounds and syllables in words, the ability to identify letters, shapes, and numbers, the ability to pay attention and react to a story, and the understanding that language as well as written text carries meaning. It is especially important for babies and young children with hearing loss to develop competence in preliteracy skills as these skills will promote reading readiness and help prevent future reading difficulties.

Birth to two years of age is a crucial period for the development of language and preliteracy skills. You can foster the development of these skills by simply exposing your child to books. When you read to your child, you teach fundamental skills about the communication process and build listening, memory, and vocabulary skills. Furthermore, research has shown that shared book reading experiences have a special role in fostering early literacy development by building background knowledge about the world, and concepts about books and print.<sup>1</sup> Sitting down and reading with your child is truly one of the best ways you can begin to lay the foundation for preliteracy skills. The chart below has been created for parents and outlines how to use books to facilitate preliteracy skills with babies and very young children.

### Reading with Babies 0–6 months

During the first few months of life, your baby loves to hear your voice so you can read almost anything. Sit your baby on your lap and get close. Cuddling while you read helps your baby feel safe, warm, and connected to you.

Role of the Adult	Expectations for the Child
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate to your baby that reading a book is a fun part of the daily routine.</li> <li>• Read with expression by changing the pitch of your voice where it is appropriate.</li> <li>• Read in an exaggerated way where it is appropriate.</li> <li>• Stress particular words or phrases for emphasis.</li> <li>• Use different voices for different characters.</li> <li>• Read just a few pages at a time.</li> <li>• Don't worry about following the text exactly.</li> <li>• Stop once in a while to make comments and pose questions about pictures. Your baby will not be able to respond, but this lays the groundwork for doing so later on.</li> <li>• Demonstrate when to turn the page.</li> <li>• Make funny animal sounds.</li> <li>• Read the same books over and over again. Babies love repetition.</li> </ul>	<p><b>0–3 months</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listens and observes.</li> <li>• Bonds with adult.</li> <li>• Pays attention to the sounds and rhythm of language.</li> </ul> <p><b>3–6 months</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has a basic familiarity with the sounds and rhythm of language.</li> <li>• A desire to hold, touch, and mouth books.</li> <li>• Increased interest in pictures, bright and bold colors, and tactile elements.</li> <li>• Curiosity about pictures of faces.</li> <li>• Makes sounds and noises while listening to stories.</li> </ul>

## Reading with Babies 6–12 months

As your baby matures he or she will begin to be more responsive as you read. Continue to do all the things you have been doing while also adding the suggestions below. Your role has not changed but your baby may begin to develop some new and exciting behaviors during story time.

Role of the Adult	Expectations for the Child
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help your baby turn pages or let them turn pages on their own.</li> <li>• As you read stop and describe any pictures your baby points to or seems curious about.</li> <li>• Keep books on low shelves so your baby can play with them anytime.</li> <li>• Choose books that invite your baby to repeat simple words or phrases.</li> <li>• Point to and name the pictures to help your baby learn words.</li> <li>• Name the parts of faces you see in pictures as you read. For example, "See the baby's nose. You have a nose too." You can touch the photo and then your baby's nose as you say this to reinforce the word "nose".</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognizes some familiar objects.</li> <li>• Begins to understand that pictures represent objects.</li> <li>• Points to or pats pictures.</li> <li>• Prefers pictures of faces.</li> <li>• Turns pages with help.</li> <li>• Attempts to repeat sounds while reading.</li> <li>• Listens and observes with increased attention, yet continues to have a short attention span for long books.</li> <li>• Develops preferences for certain pictures or books.</li> <li>• Continues to hold, touch, and mouth books.</li> </ul>

## Reading with Toddlers 12–18 months

At this age your toddler is familiar with common objects and has a basic understanding of everyday routines. Your toddler is also starting to explore the world around them. Begin to incorporate the suggestions below into your reading routine.

Role of the Adult	Expectations for the Child
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read simple stories about daily routines like bedtime or bath time.</li> <li>• Show your toddler the cover page. Explain what the story is about.</li> <li>• Run your finger along the words as you read them to demonstrate that words have meaning and text is read from left to right.</li> <li>• Let your toddler "read" pages that interest them. Even if out of order.</li> <li>• Choose books that make noises and have fold-out sections they can lift to reveal hidden surprises.</li> <li>• Ask specific questions like "Where's the bird?" and let your toddler point to it.</li> <li>• Let your toddler move around while you are reading. Stop reading if your toddler is too active and does not seem interested in the task.</li> <li>• Count out loud when there are opportunities in the story to do so.</li> <li>• Talk about how pictures of objects can be grouped. For example "These are all red" or "These are all fruits".</li> <li>• Continue to choose books that invite your toddler to repeat simple words or phrases.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enjoys choosing a book to read.</li> <li>• Attempts to turn pages on his or her own.</li> <li>• "Reads" (holds book and mimics the sounds and rhythms of language).</li> <li>• Begins to point to and names familiar objects in a book.</li> <li>• Enjoys the familiar routine of reading books.</li> <li>• Asks to hear the same books over and over again.</li> </ul>



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## Reading with Toddlers 18–24 months

At this age your toddler is asserting his or her independence by trying to do lots of things on their own like feeding and undressing. Toddlers at this age are also becoming more imaginative and start to engage in simple pretend play like feeding a doll. You may also notice that your toddler is able to express some basic feelings as well as likes and dislikes. Expand your story time by incorporating the suggestions below.

Role of the Adult	Expectations for the Child
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Point out the author’s and illustrator’s names.</li> <li>• Read simple stories about familiar events such as birthdays and going to school.</li> <li>• Read simple stories with characters your child likes.</li> <li>• Encourage your child to talk about the story by asking questions like “What will happen next?”</li> <li>• Encourage your child to point to and name pictures on their own.</li> <li>• Pause and let your child try to fill in the words or phrases of familiar stories.</li> <li>• Encourage your child to “read” his or her favorite book to you.</li> <li>• Let your toddler move around while you are reading. Stop reading if your toddler is too active and does not seem interested in the task.</li> <li>• Continue to count or group objects by asking questions like “How many ducks are there?” and then count them out loud.</li> <li>• Continue to run your finger along the words as you read them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attempts to fill in words or familiar phrases from the story when you pause.</li> <li>• Follows simple commands like “Point to the picture of the apple”.</li> <li>• Begins to describe pictures using two words together for example “big dog”.</li> <li>• Continues to “read” (holds book and mimics sounds and rhythms of language).</li> </ul>

## Reading with Toddlers 24–36 months

At this age toddlers have a lively imagination and are using more language as they engage in pretend play. They also are interested in playing with and observing other children. At this age toddlers are also beginning to count and match objects, and can respond to simple directions. Begin to incorporate the suggestions below into your reading routine.

Role of the Adult	Expectations for the Child
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let your child try to count by asking questions like “How many balls are there?”.</li> <li>• Let your child try to categorize objects by asking questions like “Which ones are animals?”.</li> <li>• Begin a discussion by relating the story to your child’s own experiences. For example, if reading a book about a birthday party ask your child “How did we celebrate your birthday?”.</li> <li>• Encourage your child to tell or draw their own stories.</li> <li>• Ask your child to name and tell you what sounds particular letters make.</li> <li>• Ask your child questions about emotions. For example, “Do you think this character is happy or sad?”</li> <li>• Visit the library and let your child pick out books that interest them.</li> <li>• Subscribe to a fun age appropriate magazine.</li> <li>• Continue to ask your child open ended questions about the story like “What will happen next?”.</li> <li>• Continue to run your finger along the words as you read them.</li> <li>• Continue to encourage your child to “read” his or her favorite book to you.</li> <li>• Continue to pause and let your child fill in words or phrases.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asks questions about the story.</li> <li>• May try to guess what comes next in a story.</li> <li>• May try to count or group objects.</li> <li>• Names and describes familiar characters with adult assistance.</li> <li>• Recalls characters or events in familiar books.</li> <li>• Can retell part of or the whole story.</li> <li>• Identifies some letters with assistance.</li> <li>• Can match an object in their hand or in the room to a picture in book.</li> </ul>

## Book Features

Now that you have a good understanding of how to use books to build preliteracy skills it is time to read with your child. For babies and very young toddlers, choose books that are smaller in size with simple pictures, words, and phrases. As your child matures, incorporate longer books with simple story lines. Use the table below to assist you in choosing books for story time and then get ready to sit down and read!

0–18 Months	18–36 Months
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Small books that babies can easily grasp</li><li>Simple letter books</li><li>Simple color books</li><li>Simple shape books</li><li>Simple rhyming books</li><li>Chunky board books</li><li>Small plastic photo albums filled with family members pictures</li><li>Books with large pictures</li><li>Books with bright designs</li><li>Books with fold-out flaps and surprises</li><li>Books with tactile features such as cloth and vinyl elements</li><li>Books with nursery rhymes</li><li>Books about familiar routines (for example bath time, bed time, getting dressed)</li><li>Books with pictures of babies</li><li>Books with familiar objects</li><li>Books with repetitive phrases</li><li>Books with large print</li><li>Books that make noise</li><li>Books that introduce sounds</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Books with characters your child likes</li><li>Books with predictable story lines</li><li>Books about familiar events such as holidays or birthdays</li><li>Books with question words</li><li>Books about emotions</li><li>Books with more elaborate pictures</li><li>Books that teach children helpful lessons (for example, following rules or making friends)</li><li>Books about the alphabet</li><li>Books about families</li><li>Books that encourage counting</li><li>Books about school</li></ul>

## Beyond Books

- Talk to your child during routines and activities by describing what you are doing or what is going on.
- Sing songs or do movement activities that involve imitation.
- Recognize when a toddler is initiating a conversation, even when it's not verbal (for example, a child holds up his empty cup to the caregiver), and respond in a way that will invite more interaction ("I see your cup, Jack. Do you want milk?").
- Try to keep directive language (telling your child to do or not do something) to a minimum and increase your conversational language.
- Play with puppets, dolls, and toys that represent people to encourage your child to incorporate language into their play.
- Keep a variety of writing tools (crayons and markers) and surfaces (pads of paper, wipe it boards, easels) around your home to provide your child with opportunities for scribbling and drawing during the day.
- Make sure your child has lots of opportunities to see their own written name. Incorporate your child's written name into activities and routines.



- Let your child play with letters that can be manipulated. For example, magnet letters, alphabet puzzles, letter stamps, and games that involve recognizing letters and letter sounds, etc.
- Play games with children that build letter and letter sound knowledge.
- Play games that focus on things like alliteration, rhyming, listening for the beginning or ending sounds in words, and blending and taking away sounds in words.
- Encourage and support all attempts at writing, including when your child begins to write his or her name.
- Caption your child's own stories, drawings or other creative work.
- Encourage your child to dictate his or her stories to you and then read the stories aloud.
- Do activities that encourage reading. For example, following a recipe or instructions for how to put together a simple toy.
- Make up a story about a real experience your child had. For example, "We got in the car, we drove to the zoo. We saw lions, monkeys, and bears. We got ice-cream. We had a fun day."
- Point out numbers, letters, and shapes as you drive or shop.
- Make up songs to sing during every day routines with your child. For example make up a song to sing during bath time and sing the words that go with the routine like, "Wash, wash, wash your face/hands/tummy/arms/legs".
- Incorporate music into reading routines. For example, incorporate movement with music to enhance literacy skills during book reading (move your body Up, Up, Up while a flower grows and sing the words together in an ascending scale). Or, find music to go along with a story, like train music when reading about choo-choo trains.
- Practice the alphabet and the say the sounds each letter makes.
- Extend and expand on what children say to encourage more complex speech.

**Concept idea by Krista S. Heavner, MS, CCC-SLP/LSLC Cert AVT**

## References

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