

Reading to your child: Building bonds and boosting brainpower



Highlights

Reading aloud from infancy stimulates brain development

Even very young babies benefit from being read to

Reading supports language, emotional, and social development

Books, songs, and stories help build literacy skills

Daily reading habits create strong parent-child bonds

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Why shared reading builds early literacy

Reading to your child from an early age is a great way to bond and help them develop a love for books. This habit not only strengthens language skills but

is also enjoyable for both you and your child.

Even if you're not confident in your reading abilities, you can still create stories, share stories from your childhood, or listen to audio books with your child.

Reading aloud stimulates brain development while strengthening the parent-child relationship and building language, literacy, and social-emotional skills. Infants begin benefiting from regular reading as early as 8 months.

Reading helps develop literacy and communication skills such as:

- Oral language
- Vocabulary
- Speech patterns
- Alphabet knowledge

Studies show that toddlers whose parents read to them daily have higher average reading scores by Year 3 than those whose parents read to them less often.

Other activities that support development include:

- Singing
- Nursery rhymes
- Conversations
- Oral storytelling

When to begin reading with your baby

Your baby can benefit from being read to, even before they fully understand.

Don't worry if you can't finish an entire book. When reading with young children, it's more about interaction and conversation than sitting still and listening. Make it enjoyable with stories, songs, and playful conversation.

Keep your baby engaged by changing your voice for different characters or animals. Add facial expressions or actions to bring the story to life. This helps your baby connect meaning to what you're reading.

Choosing books for babies and toddlers

Start with board books that include touch and texture for a multisensory experience.

Choose books you enjoy. It doesn't matter if you read the same one repeatedly, as repetition is important for language development. Incorporate movement and actions tied to the story-for instance, when reading Humpty Dumpty, pretend to fall at the right moment, which your child will soon look forward to.

Your child may develop a preference for a particular book and want to hear it again and again. While it may seem repetitive, it's crucial for helping children learn word meanings.

As your child grows, they'll enjoy books with coherent stories and conclusions. These books help develop attention span and enrich vocabulary and verbal skills.

What books are best for older children

As your child grows, introduce more complex books:

Early communicators \ (up to 18 months\)

Sturdy books that are easy for your baby to hold

Books with colorful pictures of familiar objects

Textured books, flaps, cut-outs, puppets, mirrors, rattles

Stories with repetition, rhyme, and rhythm

Relatable stories

Early language users \ (1 - 2 years\)

Stories with a clear beginning, middle, and end

Books featuring characters like people, animals, or toys

Short, engaging stories

Catchy phrases for children to repeat

Stories with opportunities to predict events

Books introducing concepts like colors, numbers, shapes, rhymes, or songs

Books featuring photos or images of your child's interests

Language and emergent literacy learners (2.5 - 5 years)

Books with longer, more detailed stories

Stories exploring complex ideas like feelings, characters, or challenges

Longer rhymes, poems, or songs

Encouraging language and reading through daily habits

Books can be purchased in stores or online, or borrowed from your local library or daycare. Many books indicate the appropriate age range.

If your family speaks multiple languages, consider reading to your child in both languages to enhance their learning experience.

Tips for reading

Set aside time each day to read-bedtime is a great option, but reading can happen any time

Turn off distractions like the TV or radio to allow your child to focus on your voice

Make reading special by cuddling with your child

Keep books easily accessible for your child to explore

Read with expression-change your pitch and use different voices for characters to make it fun

Ask your child questions about the story. Encourage them to finish familiar sentences, make animal sounds, or sing songs

Don't worry if your child wants to hear the same book repeatedly-repetition is key to their learning process

Tools and Assistance

Visit your local library or book club for free reading materials and recommendations

Pediatricians and early childhood educators can guide you in selecting age-appropriate books

Look for parenting groups or early literacy workshops in your area

Many community centers and early education programs provide resources and reading sessions

Books in multiple languages are often available through multicultural family networks and educational programs