

Reading out loud to a baby is an important activity for not only bonding, but for your baby's brain. The roots of language are developing way before a baby can talk. But when should you start reading to your baby? As early as possible!

Babies who are exposed to more language sounds early tend to have better language and literacy/reading skills later in life. Babies are born ready to learn. A young brain is like a little sponge, absorbing and learning something all the time. Even while still in the womb—by the 3<sup>rd</sup> trimester—babies can hear the sounds of the outside world, including a parent's voice.

Exposure to different sounds stimulates your baby's brain to build connections. So reading to your baby, whether still in the womb or if already born, is actually helping brain development and growth!

Electronic books and reading games can be helpful at times for older age groups, but an actual book with words and pages is more appropriate for the little ones. Even if a baby doesn't understand the words you're saying, the process of reading an actual book engages their senses; various sounds and emotions of the reader's voice, the look & feel of the book material, turning of pages, and so on. This can help with development of listening skills, vocabulary, memory, routine, colors/numbers/shapes, and more.

Of course, it's important to keep in mind what types of books are appropriate for different stages. During the first few months, babies can't see much color, so the type of book you read doesn't really matter. They just like to hear your voice. As your baby gets more interested in looking at things, choose books with simple pictures against solid backgrounds.

As your baby begins to grab and reach for things, you can read vinyl or cloth books that have faces, bright colors, and shapes. Paper pages for this age-group are sure to get ripped and put into a drooling mouth. When your baby begins to respond to what's inside the books, board books with pictures of babies or familiar objects like toys can be especially fun for baby. When your baby starts to do things like sitting up or eating finger foods, find simple stories about daily routines like bedtime or bathtime. When your child starts talking, books that let babies repeat simple words or phrases are great for language development.

Different textures like crinkly, soft, scratchy—such as the touch'n'feel books-- are also great for this age group. Board books make page turning easier for infants, and vinyl or cloth books can go everywhere—even the tub. Babies of any age like photo albums with pictures of people they know and love. And once baby finds a favorite, they will want to read the same book over, and over, and over again.

Not a very good reader? No problem! You can make things up as you go along...they won't know the difference anyways, especially when baby is very young. Before you know it, they will be reading the book back to YOU.

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