

Especially for parents of toddlers!

A Book By Its Cover

Storytelling and Listening

Toddlers often have a few favorite books they keep close by and want to “read” again and again. You can use these “old favorites” in your everyday routines. Use these books to help your toddler develop love of books, word skills, and familiarity with the structure of books.

What is the practice?

Toddlers learn to recognize favorite books by the pictures on their covers. The words on a cover also help them start learning the rules of print. You can help your toddler build important pre-reading skills by examining book covers with him. Encourage him to pay attention to a book’s cover. Ask questions and point out different features of text.



What does the practice look like?

A toddler selects a new library book to read at bed time. With help from his mom, he remembers the title. Together they point out and label the most exciting pictures and objects on the cover. They point out exciting pictures within the book. They point to the words in the title with their fingers while saying them. They talk about the particular features of this cover and book—how big it is, what colors they see, etc.

How do you do the practice?

Reading the same book over and over to a toddler can get dull for adults. But this process is an important one. Repeated reading gives toddlers the chance to become familiar with the words they are hearing. It helps them understand a story better, and start making connections among pictures, print, and spoken words. So take a deep breath and read it *again*! You’re giving your child a gift! Here are some ideas to make repeated readings more fun:

- Ask your toddler to tell you everything she can about the cover of her favorite book. What colors are there? What’s in the pictures? How do the people (or animals) look—happy, sad, scared, etc?
- Older toddlers can start thinking about why a cover looks the way it does. For example, ask her what she sees on the cover of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Eric Carle). Why is the caterpillar on the cover? With your help, she can begin to understand that a cover shows pictures of important parts of a book. She learns the cover can be useful in helping predict what a story will be about.
- Encourage her to find books by looking at their covers. For example, when she wants to read *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* (Laura Joffe Numeroff), tell her to go look at all her books. Tell her to find it by its cover picture, color, shape, etc. Give her clues until she recognizes it on her own.
- When looking at new books, start with the cover, too. Spend a minute looking at and talking about the words and pictures on the cover. Point to the words on the cover as you read them. This helps to make the connection between the words she hears and what she sees.
- Describing covers is a great opportunity for your toddler to learn new words. You can introduce and use color, size, and shape words to describe covers.
- This practice works best with old-favorite books. Toddlers are better able to pay attention to details in books they have seen many times. When you share a familiar book, see if you can both notice something new that you haven’t talked about before.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your toddler look at covers before opening books?
- Does your toddler use the cover of the book to identify which one she wants?
- Is your toddler excited about reading and talking about books with you?

Take a look at more fun with book covers

Follow the Clues

Two-year-old Gustavo sometimes has trouble finding his favorite story about *Bob the Builder* on his book shelf. When he tells his mom which book he wants to read at bedtime, she gives him clues about what to look for. "The book you want is yellow," she says, as Gustavo scans the shelf. "And it's short and fat." When he finds it, they spend a few minutes looking at the cover together before reading. "Who's that?" his mom asks. "Bob the Builder!" Gustavo says. "Right! And what's he doing?" "Driving." "Yes, he's driving on the road," Mom says. "I wonder where he's going. Should we read it and find out?" Gustavo opens his book happily.



Cover Clues

One of 3-year-old Liam's favorite things to do is pretending to "read" books to his baby brother. At the library, his mom helps Liam figure out the subject of different books by looking at their covers for clues. "What do you see here?" his mom asks, pointing to the bear on a book's front. "Big bear," Liam says. "That's right, so the book might be about the adventures of a big, brown bear," Mom says. "And paint buckets," Liam points out. "Could the bear be an artist?" Mom asks. "Here's the title." She reads the title out loud while pointing to each word. She knows Liam listens closely. When he shows the book to his brother at home, he tells the baby, "This is a book about a bear who paints with many colors."

Gotcha Covered!

Two-year-old Shanna has language delays and trouble staying focused. But she loves one-on-one time cuddling and looking at books with her mom. Mom starts their story times by showing Shanna the cover of the book they're going to read. As Shanna points to pictures, she names them. "This is a colorful cover, Shanna," Mom says, speaking slowly and clearly. "Do you see anything that's the same color as the little boy's orange pants?" Shanna looks around, and Mom helps by pointing to Shanna's shirt. "What about your shirt? Is that orange too?" "Orange," Shanna says, pointing from the book to the shirt. "Good!" Mom says. "What other colors do we see on this cover?" Sometimes they don't make it past the cover before Shanna loses interest in a book. But talking about what's on book covers seems to help Shanna make the connection between what she hears and sees.

