

Especially for parents of toddlers!

Looking at Books Together

Storytelling and Listening

Before a child reads on her own, she needs to share books with adults. Shared reading is one way to become aware of the rules about printed material. Reading to toddlers improves their understanding of both printed material and oral language. This handout includes ideas to help strengthen your toddler's understanding of printed materials—an important early literacy skill.

What is the practice?

Toddlers learn about reading when they look at and talk about words in a story with an adult. This exploration of books helps toddlers understand that printed letters and words have meaning.

What does the practice look like?

You can help your toddler understand that the printed matter (pictures, letters, and words) in a book has meaning. Talk with your child while pointing out pictures, words, or letters that match what you are saying. Ask your child to point to the picture of her favorite animal. You find and point to the word that labels the animal.



How do you do the practice?

Most days present natural opportunities for sharing a book with your toddler. Before a nap or while waiting for dinner are good times to pick up your toddler's favorite books to share.

- Be sure the books interest your child. Toddlers always seem to have one or two favorite books that you can keep on hand. You can also introduce some new books about things that she likes.
- Let your toddler be a leader, choosing which book she wants to read.
- As you talk about the book, point to pictures, words, and letters. Tell your child, for example, "This word is dog. Can you show me the picture of the dog?" Or "This letter is A. That is the first letter of your name, Alan."
- When you are reading a sentence, move your finger under the words you are reading. This shows your toddler that English words are read from the left to the right side of the page.
- Occasionally point to a letter like *B*. Explain, "This letter is a *B* and it makes the *Bbb* sound, like in the word *baby*." Ask her to say *Bbb* or *baby*. This helps her begin to see the connection between letters and their sounds.
- As you "read" the book, let your child hold it and turn the pages. Don't worry about skipping pages. With a toddler, reading every page is not necessary. Letting your child hold the book and explore it encourages her to take an active part in the reading experience.
- Smiling and commenting on her exploration of the book or her attempts to answer your questions encourages her. A little encouragement will help keep her involved in the activity.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your toddler notice the printed words or letters as you talk about them?
- Does your toddler seem to enjoy looking at books with words?
- Does your child point to letters and words, trying to say them?

More looking at books with your toddler

Reading While Waiting

Devonne, age 25 months, and her mom often find themselves waiting. They may be waiting at a doctor's appointment or at the laundromat for the clothes to finish drying. Devonne's mom always has a few of her daughter's favorite zoo books with them. She will pull them out and let Devonne pick the one she wants first. Mom asks her, "What is the picture on the cover?" and points to the word zoo in the title. Devonne turns the page and Mom points to the word zoo when she reads it. Mom keeps reading the book as Devonne asks questions. Mom points to the letters and words until Devonne gets tired of reading.



Bookstore Time

Two-year-old Tamsin, her mom, and her big brother, David, often enjoy browsing at a neighborhood used-book store. Today Mom tells the children they may each select two books to buy and take home. Together they look at picture books in the children's section. They look at a book to decide if they want it. Their mom reads the title aloud while she points to each word. She encourages Tamsin and David to repeat the title. They explore each book, looking at the pictures and pointing to the words to see what the book is about. Finally the children pick their books and excitedly take them to the front to pay for them.

A Touch of Reading

Although 20-month-old Max has a vision deficit, his mom often reads with him. She uses books made of different materials or with different textures. One of Max's favorite books has a picture of an apple that is very smooth. Max touches the apple and his mom says, "It's an apple that looks good enough to eat." She then takes his hand and helps him feel the Braille words embossed on the page. Max's mom helps him touch the Braille letter "A". She tells him the name of the letter and that "A" is the first letter in the word *apple*.

