Your Growing Reader

A NEW PARENTS’ GUIDE TO EARLY LITERACY
As a new parent, you are facing one of life’s most rewarding and challenging experiences — raising a child. Although kindergarten may seem like a long way off, the things you do and say in the next five years will determine how easily your child learns to read. Research shows that parents play a critical role in their baby’s language and literacy development. Fortunately, helping your child learn is really quite simple — the best learning tool for a young child is an interactive adult! Talking, singing, and reading with your baby are the keys to learning. In fact, reading aloud is the best investment you can make in your child’s education.

Above all, creating a warm, loving relationship with your child is essential to early learning. When you and your baby have a strong bond, she will gain the confidence and the security she needs to learn. You establish this long-lasting attachment with your child by being responsive to her needs and talking, singing and reading together every day. This book illustrates how to provide a healthy learning environment for your child. As you read this, remember that children develop at their own paces and in their own ways.
It is impossible to spoil your baby!

You may hear that a baby just needs to “cry it out,” but research shows that babies whose needs are met in a timely way are more independent as they grow.
You cannot “spoil” a baby; it’s just not possible. When your baby fusses or cries, go to him promptly. When you do, he learns that he is important to you and that he can trust you.

Your baby’s crying or fussing is not planned or thought out. This is his only way of communicating his needs. You may fear that responding quickly to your baby’s cries will make him more needy. Actually, the opposite is true! In time, he will cry less, sleep more at night and develop a secure attachment to you. Children who have a close relationship with a nurturing parent are better able to explore alone, separate when necessary and operate independently from that parent. Plus he will learn more easily at school and grow up to become an adult who can establish better social relationships. You can help nurture this emotional bond between you and your baby by reading together every day. So, do not worry if you are picking up your baby when he cries – this is how he knows he is loved and cherished.

Your relationship with your baby is the foundation for healthy development. Sharing books together builds this relationship.
Simple things can boost your baby’s brain power.

Babies are born learning, and what they learn is up to you. Touch, cuddle and hold your baby! Talk, sing and read to your baby!
The American Academy of Pediatrics is concerned about the impact of television programming intended for children younger than age 2 and how it could affect your child’s development. Pediatricians strongly oppose targeted programming, especially when it’s used to market toys, games, dolls, unhealthy food and other products to toddlers. Any positive effect of television on infants and toddlers is still open to question, but the benefits of parent-child interactions are proven. Under age 2, talking, singing, reading, listening to music or playing are far more important to a child’s development than any TV show. For more information on your child’s health, visit www.aap.org.

During the first few years of life, your baby is experiencing a critical period of brain growth. In fact, what happens or doesn’t happen in baby’s first few years largely determines how her brain will develop and how she will interact with the world throughout her life.

Unlike other organs, the brain is remarkably unfinished at birth. Your baby’s 100 million brain cells or neurons are not connected in networks yet, but become connected in response to her early interactions and experiences. Sensory stimulation, such as touch, taste, sight, sound and smell, and the social and emotional relationships she has formed, create the connections in her brain that will influence a lifetime of skills and potential. We used to think that baby’s intelligence and personality were genetically determined; now we know that baby’s early experiences directly affect how the brain is “wired.” The best way to strengthen your baby’s brain is to talk, talk, talk! Interacting face-to-face in a loving, responsive way not only increases the language connections in her brain, but enables her to bond with you. Everyday moments are learning experiences for your baby. Experiences that are repeated will be reinforced, or made more permanent. She will grow up to be a curious and confident learner if she has both appropriate stimulation and warm, positive relationships.
Learning to read begins long before school. Every time you read to your baby, he is learning important skills that will help him learn to read. This is called early literacy.
Reading aloud is the single most important thing you can do to help your baby be ready for learning to read when he enters school. When you share books every day, your baby learns the six early literacy skills:

1. **PRINT MOTIVATION**  
   A love of books

2. **VOCABULARY**  
   Knowing the names of things

3. **PRINT AWARENESS**  
   Understanding that the symbols on a page are words to read

4. **NARRATIVE SKILLS**  
   Telling stories and being able to describe things

5. **PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS**  
   The ability to hear and play with the smaller sounds in words

6. **LETTER KNOWLEDGE**  
   Knowing that letters have names and different sounds

Children who have these six skills before they go to school learn to read more easily when they get to school. While you read with your baby, the most important thing to remember is to have fun! And always say yes when your baby asks you to read the same book again and again because repetition strengthens the connections in his brain! You can help your baby learn to read by talking and sharing books with him beginning at birth. When reading to your baby, the focus should not be on “teaching,” but on building your relationship through sharing language and a love of books. Flashcards, rote memorization are workbooks are unnecessary. The most important factor in helping your child become a reader is sharing books together every day. No one book is magic on its own; children need someone to make reading interactive and fun.
Talking with your baby can seem strange at first, but keep at it! The newborn brain is especially interested in sound, because sounds are the building blocks of human interaction — language. And reading is essentially a language skill.

Talking builds a deep emotional connection between you and your baby. When you have a quiet moment with your baby, make eye contact. Often very young babies will look you in the eye for a moment, then look away, then look back, and so on. You are now “talking” with your baby! This is also the beginning of Peek-a-boo (look, don’t look, look, don’t look).

Hold your baby face-to-face, 8–12 inches away. Catch his gaze, smile, and talk softly. When your baby vocalizes, keep the conversation going by echoing his sounds. Be sure to watch for signs about how much stimulation he desires.
Sharing books is a wonderful way to help your baby learn to talk. Start now. Don't wait. Every word you say and read to your baby builds brain connections that will make it easier for him to learn to read. It may seem too soon, but it's not. For babies from birth through 2 months old, you may read anything you wish — the newspaper, a novel, whatever — as long as your voice is friendly! Even though your baby does not understand the words you are reading yet, he loves hearing your voice and being close to you.

Babies love books that rhyme, books with simple, large pictures, and books with connected, zigzag, fold-out pages that are propped in their cribs. Or they may not look at the pictures at all! That's okay. If you keep reading and make it fun, he will be looking and listening soon. Best of all, sharing books creates a special bond between you and your baby. Cuddle your baby on your lap and read for just a few minutes several times a day. Consider this quality time to get to know your baby.

If You Were My Bunny by Kate McMullan and David McPhail
Sleepytime Rhyme by Remy Charlip
Smile! by Roberta Grobel Intrater
This Little Piggy by Jane Yolen and Will Hillenbrand
Time For Bed by Mem Fox and Jane Dyer

Multnomah County Library invites you and your baby to participate in Book Babies. This program gives your baby the opportunity to enjoy songs, action rhymes, and playtime with other families.
Many parents know they should talk to their baby often, but admit they don’t know what to say. Singing, rhyming and reading are all fun ways to talk to your baby and boost baby’s language skills.

3 → 6 MONTHS

**TALKING**  You and your baby will now engage in playful “conversations.” She will look in your eyes, smile, babble, coo, and sometimes even give you the “raspberries.” Smile in response. Treat every sound she makes as an attempt to talk to you. This includes burps, sneezes, yawns, whines and screams. When you treat these sounds as meaningful “talking,” your baby will be more likely to tell you what she wants sooner (grunt and point, reach, and so on). Talking is essential to helping your baby learn to talk and, later, read. Talk about what you are doing, while you are doing it. Talk about toes and fingers and eyes and tummies during diaper changing or other playful routines. Say your baby’s name often, and be respectful of her at all times. Tell her what is going to happen next: “I’m going to change your diaper now!”
By 3 months of age, it’s time to introduce your baby to board books. Cuddle with your baby and make it a fun, shared experience. Watch how she explores the pages with her eyes. Stop and wait until she looks away before you turn the page. Use board books with brightly colored pictures to keep your baby’s interest. Talk about the pictures. Point to animals in the book and make their sounds. Your baby may vocalize while looking at the pictures or show her excitement by batting at the book. Or she may not look at the pictures at all! That’s okay, babies are always listening.

Read many times a day, even for just a few minutes, and be sure to make it relaxed and fun. Think of books as a tool to launch conversation and closeness. The relationship you are developing with your baby is more important than reading the entire book. When you and your baby are looking at the same thing at the same time, as we do when sharing books, it’s called “joint attention.” Joint attention leads to bonding. Reading with your baby provides a great opportunity to bond. Be sure to watch your baby’s cues for how much time she wants to read together.

**Books**

- *Baby Faces* by Margaret Miller
- *Tickle Tickle* by Helen Oxenbury
- *Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes* by Annie Kubler
- *Only You* by Robin Cruise and Margaret Chodos-Irvine

**AT THE LIBRARY**

Multnomah County Library invites you and your baby to participate in Book Babies. This program gives your baby the opportunity to enjoy songs, action rhymes, and playtime with other families.
Your baby is trying out the sounds of the language he hears — and the sounds of the language he will later read. This is called babbling. Babbling is an important step toward talking and reading.

**TALKING**  Babies delight in hearing language! They develop language mostly because they want to socialize with you! Say your baby’s name often, as well as other important names in your family. Continue to narrate your day, telling him what you’re doing while you’re doing it. Starting around 6 months of age, your baby will “babble,” making sounds that imitate the tones and rhythms of the way you talk. Soon he will begin putting sounds together (“agoo”) and repeating sound patterns (“bababa”). Echo your baby’s sounds to encourage him to “talk” more, and to let him know that you want to communicate with him! Playing with sounds is an important step in learning to talk and in learning to read.
**SINGING & RHYMING**

Sometime around 6 months, your baby will reach a very important developmental skill — he will spontaneously bring his hands together in the middle. This is the beginning of coordination between the two sides of his body. Gently hold your baby’s hands and show him how to clap with interactive games like “Pat-a-Cake” and “Pease Porridge Hot.”

Songs and rhymes teach children basic language patterns and rhythms. Sing while you are doing caregiving activities, like changing diapers and bathing your baby. Dance to the rhythm of songs to emphasize the song’s tempo. Your baby’s joy will increase as songs and rhymes become familiar to him.

**READING**

If your baby reaches for a book and promptly puts it in his mouth, that’s okay! Reading sometimes looks like chewing! That’s how he learns about books. You can gently try to open it and look at the pictures together or you can use a different book, and let him “read” the first book.

There is no rule that says you must read every word (or even any words!) printed on the pages of a children’s book. Start in the middle if that is his favorite part. Books for babies usually have no story line so you can start anywhere!

Notice what your baby is looking at and talk about those objects. Babies enjoy looking at pictures, especially photos of baby faces. Point out something in a book and then show your baby the real life object, such as the teddy bear in a book and his teddy bear. It’s also fun to make a photo album of your extended family and friends. Use it to tell stories to your baby or to help him become familiar with family faces.

Read with enthusiasm and have fun! If your baby seems disinterested, do not be discouraged; it isn’t instant magic, but long term development. Your baby will love books if you love books!

**BOOKS**

*Where’s the Baby?* by Cheryl Christian · *Animal Babies* by David Doepker · *Barnyard Banter* by Denise Fleming

*My Very First Mother Goose* by Iona Opie and Rosemary Wells · *Barnyard Dance* by Sandra Boynton

**AT THE LIBRARY**

Multnomah County Library invites you and your baby to participate in Book Babies. This program gives your baby the opportunity to enjoy songs, action rhymes, and playtime with other families.
Your baby is getting close to saying her first words. To help your baby learn new words, notice what your baby is looking at and talk about it. Pay close attention to her attempts to “talk” with you. Respond to her as if you two are having a real conversation, because you are! This will encourage her to talk more. Babies can be subtle when they talk with us, so their attempts to do so can be easy to miss!

Children’s earliest words reflect their environment, so use interesting words, say your words clearly, and slow down your speech.

Your baby’s language has grown so much that she can understand and respond to simple commands, such as “wave bye-bye” or “blow a kiss.” Play “Where’s daddy?” or “Where’s mommy?” with your baby. If she responds by looking at the correct person, nod your head and exclaim, “Yes, there’s ______!” How you talk with your baby makes a difference in how well she uses language years later.
**READING**

Exploration takes center stage as your baby becomes more mobile. If you encourage her to explore, she will become curious about the world. Just be sure her environment is safe and interesting. Because she is so busy, she may want to play with toys instead of sitting right beside you. That's okay. Babies are always listening! Some babies at this stage will vocalize while pointing at pictures. Listen carefully and respond like you understand every word she says! While reading, ask her simple questions, such as “Where is the_____?” She will probably point to the picture. If she does not respond, show her by pointing to the object and answering your own question, “There is the _____!” If your baby gets excited about books, she may tear the pages. Your baby should not be scolded if a page is ripped. She's too young to understand, and does not have the hand coordination to be gentle. Think of books as an educational investment! Let your baby control the book. If she wants to turn the pages, let her! Be comfortable with her short attention span. If your baby is not interested in books, remember to keep it short, sweet and fun — and keep reading!

**SINGING & RHYMING**

Holding, rocking and cuddling with your baby stimulates her brain to release hormones that will promote learning and growth. Singing with your baby enhances her memory and increases her attention span. Your baby enjoys dancing with you to music, so fill your home with a variety of music. Your baby will also love gentle bouncing chants at this age. Although her hands are unable to do many hand movements yet, she will enjoy playing Pat-A-Cake and may try to imitate your actions. Babies love to learn about animals and the sounds they make, so “Old MacDonald” is always a favorite. Add songs and rhymes into all of your routines.

**BOOKS**

*Baby Dance* by Ann Taylor and Marjorie van Heerden · *Big Red Barn* by Margaret Wise Brown · *I Love Animals* by Flora McDonnell · *My Car* by Byron Barton · *Wheels on the Bus* by Sylvie Kantorovitz · *Where is Baby’s Belly Button?* by Karen Katz

**AT THE LIBRARY**

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TALKING  Babies all over the world typically say their first word around their first birthday, although the normal range is very wide — from 10 to 24 months. To encourage him to talk, talk to your baby a lot. He understands many, many more words than he can say (receptive vocabulary). Tell him what you are doing while you are doing it. Describe his play and name objects he sees and uses. He may point to something when he wants to know its name. You may wonder if it’s a good idea to place your baby in front of the TV to encourage him to talk. Not true! Babies who spend more time in front of the TV actually have less developed language than babies who watch little or no TV. In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no TV for baby’s first 2 years. Babies younger than 18 months do not need to learn shapes, letters or numbers. Instead, allow your baby to explore and discover his world! Give your baby wonderful learning experiences and talk about what he is seeing and doing.
SINGING & RHYMING

Babies at this age are just beginning to sing, though it may sound more like jabbering. This is a fun time to teach new songs and use hand movements to old favorites, like “Eesny, Weensy Spider.” Do not expect perfection; any attempt is terrific!

READING

Some babies at this stage will “book babble.” When your baby book babbles, he sounds like he is “reading” the book. Rejoice! This is early literacy! He is on his way to becoming a reader. Be a good role model by letting your baby see you reading, too.

As your baby’s vocabulary grows, his interest in books will grow, too. Read books that are related to actions he is learning, such as feeding himself with a spoon and drinking from a cup. Name objects in books and encourage your beginning talker to repeat words. Make connections between pictures in the book and items in your home. Ask him questions while looking at pictures. If your baby is interested in holding the book and turning the page, or several pages at once, let him. Provide your child with books that can easily be carried by little hands and books that offer flaps and textures he can explore. Don’t worry if your baby wants the same book read over and over. Repetition helps him hear the different sounds that make up words, and understand the different meanings of words. Repeating a favorite story gives your baby a sense of mastery.

Make reading an opportunity to cuddle, if possible. But if your baby is too busy, read aloud as your little one plays nearby. Your baby does not need to look at the book to make reading worthwhile.

BOOKS

Busy Barnyard by John Schindel · Cookie’s Week by Cindy Ward and Tomie dePaola · Five Little Ducks by Dan Yaccarino

Peek-a-Zoo by Marie Torres Cimarusti and Stephanie Peterson · Where’s Spot? by Eric Hill

AT THE LIBRARY

Multnomah County Library invites you and your child to participate in Tiny Tots. This action-packed program engages new walkers and emerging talkers in songs, movement activities, rhymes, books and playtime.
Your toddler is now entering the “language explosion” stage. She is learning as many as nine new words a day, 63 words a week!

18 → 24 MONTHS

**TALKING**  Your baby is now a toddler! She understands most of the conversations you have with her and the books you read to her. She is working hard to put many words together (expressive vocabulary). Now she may babble in short phrases, such as “go out” or “more juice” or “daddy work.” Encourage her to talk more by asking her questions. Research shows that parents who encourage conversation with their toddlers raise children who talk more and talk earlier. Sometimes her words don’t sound exactly right, but that’s okay. Rather than telling her that she is wrong, just repeat her sentence and say the word correctly. She will hear the difference and begin to say it correctly.

Your toddler will understand when you talk about things that she can see or feel. She may have more difficulty understanding if you talk about things in the past or the future. However, pay attention! Toddlers are learning to talk about past and future events, though it may be hard to catch.
Books are a wonderful source of rich words for your toddler’s growing vocabulary, especially if you choose books that follow her interests. She may point to and name familiar objects and, if you pause while reading a favorite story, she may fill in the next word. Around 17 months, some toddlers will pretend to read to their dolls or stuffed animals. This is early literacy!

Make sharing books very interactive by asking her questions, such as “Where’s ____?” and “What’s ____?” and by linking the book to your toddler’s experiences. “This dog is very big, just like grandpa’s dog.” If she says, “Grandpa’s dog big,” expand her sentence by adding, “Yes, grandpa’s dog is big and noisy. He barks and barks.”

Your toddler’s attention span is highly variable, so follow her lead for how long she wants to participate. Some days, she may just want to cuddle with you and read book after book. Some days, she may be too busy running around to read! If so, read while she orbits the room — she’s still listening! Your toddler does not need to look at the book to make reading worthwhile. Take books with you wherever you go. The goal is to have fun with books.

**Books**

*Clip-Clop* by Nicola Smee · *Dig Dig Digging* by Margaret Mayo and Alex Ayliffe · *Hand Rhymes* by Marc Brown

*The Bridge Is UP* by Babs Bell and Rob Hefferan · *Walking Through The Jungle* by Julie Lacome

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**SINGING & RHYMING**

Rhyming leads to reading. Children who sing songs, recite rhymes and read rhyming books develop phonological awareness, which is the ability to hear the different sounds in words. This is a very important skill for learning to read. When children recognize that two words sound almost the same, such as “red” and “bed,” they are preparing for reading. Play with the sounds in words, like “wishy-washy” or “fuzzy-wuzzy.” Just have fun by repeating silly words, like “snickerdoodle.” Make noises by changing the shape of your mouth or tone of your voice. Your toddler may have favorite songs, action rhymes and finger plays and may want to do them repeatedly! That’s great. The repetition that your toddler enjoys may be tiresome for you, but these actions are helping to make brain connections important for healthy development!

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How you read is as important as how often you read.

There is no right or wrong way to read aloud, but there is one very powerful technique that will help your child learn to read more easily. Have a conversation!
When you have a conversation with your child while you read, by asking her questions about the pictures and relating the story to her life, you are helping her develop two important early literacy skills: vocabulary and narrative skill.

This reading technique is called *dialogic reading*. Here’s how it works. Point to and talk about pictures in the book. Ask your child a question — one to which you know she knows the correct answer. This will start the give-and-take of conversation, and her success will encourage her to talk more. After asking her a question, wait for and listen to her answer. Affirm her answer, repeat it, and expand on it. This is how it sounds:

You ask, “What does that animal say?”

She replies, “Quack.”

You affirm her answer, “Yes! The duck says, ‘quack.’”

Ask just a few questions in each book, and be sure not to make it seem like a test. Other good questions to ask your child while reading are:

- “What is this?”
- “What is she/he doing?”
- “Where is that duck going?”
- “What color is that?”
- “What does that do?”

When you relate the pictures or events to your child’s personal experiences, she will be more interested. Let your child ask you questions, too! Remember, when you repeatedly cuddle, talk, sing and read to your baby, you are “wiring” your baby’s brain for learning.
The brain development of infants and toddlers proceeds at a staggering pace. By the age of three, a child’s brain has 1,000 trillion synapses—about twice as many as her pediatrician’s.

- from Rethinking the Brain by Rima Shore