

Tips for Parents: Choosing Books for Infants and Toddlers

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Reading is an important skill for future learning. Here are some tips for choosing good books for infants and toddlers. Parents, caregivers, and guardians may find these tips helpful.

The following tips sheet is provided courtesy of the **National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL)**.

Infants: Birth to 6 Months

- **Content.** Choose books with large pictures or bright and bold illustrations set against a contrasting background. Look for books that have simple pictures, one per page.
- **Language.** Infants will enjoy looking through wordless picture books, or books that have just a single word along with a big picture. But also try books that contain phrases or short sentences. It's important for infants to hear language. Nursery rhymes and verse books are good for this age, too.
- **Design.** Books for infants should be interesting and appealing to look at. Try stiff cardboard books, books with fold-out pages that create colorful panels, cloth or soft vinyl books, and books with handles.
- **Reading Aloud.** Infants want your full attention, so try reciting rhymes and songs that you remember by heart. Also, try reading to your infant while she has a toy to hold. Reading at bedtime is always a nice way to end the day!

Infants: 7 to 12 Months

- **Content.** Children this age will enjoy books with medium to large photos and bright, bold illustrations. Look for books that have simple drawings of familiar things, actions, and events.
- **Language.** Children begin to key into content and can relate pictures to their world. While they still enjoy picture books, try some books with simple stories that have one line of text per page.
- **Design.** Infants this age like to handle cloth and vinyl books, and cardboard books with stiff, thick pages.

- **Reading Aloud.** As your baby gets older, try this four-part interaction sequence:
 1. Get your baby's attention by pointing out something in a book. ("Look!")
 2. Ask a labeling question. ("What's that?")
 3. Wait for your baby to respond, verbally or non-verbally. If necessary, provide the answer yourself. ("That's a monkey!")
 4. Acknowledge your baby's response. ("Yes" or repeat your baby's word.) If your baby mislabels the picture, correct him in a positive manner. ("Yes, it's brown like a dog, but it's a monkey.")

Keep in mind that you may not get through a whole book in one reading. As your child starts to explore books, support her progress by watching, listening, and acknowledging.

Infants: 12 to 18 months

- **Content.** For children this age, try books with pictures of familiar characters, like animals, children, TV characters, or adults in familiar roles. Look for books that have action pictures - your baby is starting to be able to enjoy pictures with more details.
- **Language.** This is a great age to try books with songs and repetitive verses. Books that have a simple story line that relates to your child's own experiences will also have appeal. You might also look for theme books that show a series of related pictures and a few words. These books follow a progression of simple activities, but don't try to introduce a plot or complex storyline.
- **Design.** Even though your baby is growing fast, she'll still enjoy playing with books with handles and books with stiff, thick pages. And she'll still like having these books read to her. Books with thinner pages that are plastic-coated are also a good choice for this age.
- **Reading Aloud.** Your infant will probably still enjoy reading with you as he sits on your lap or close to you in a comfortable chair. This helps your baby associate reading with feeling secure. Connecting sounds with the pictures he sees in the books will make reading together even more fun. Make your own sounds, and don't be surprised if your baby joins in! You may also notice your child looking through the book alone and making noises (sometimes called "book babble").

Toddlers: 19 to 30 Months

- **Content.** Toddlers will continue to enjoy books with familiar characters, but they also will begin to take interest in pictures filled with information, action, and detail. Try some short stories, cause and effect stories, and fictional books that describe a problem or circumstance to overcome.
- **Language.** Try predictable books with repeated text, words that rhyme, and pictures that correspond to the text. Books with songs and repetitive verses are still a good choice for this age.

- **Design.** Toddlers can enjoy books with paper pages—but will still like books with a picture on every page and just a little bit of text.
- **Reading Aloud.** Let your toddler decide if she wants to sit on your lap while you read, or next to you on the couch or floor. Follow her cues. Talk about the characters and events in the story, relating them to your child's own experiences. Pause when you read aloud to let your child fill in a word or phrase. This works great with rhyming and repetitive books.

Written by the National Center for Family Literacy.

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