

20 Ways to Raise a Book-Smart Baby

Early Literacy Experiences for Babies and Toddlers

1. Read to your child daily from birth on. Read several times during the day, even if it's for just a few minutes at a time.
2. When your baby begins to handle their own books, give them board books with heavy pages, rounded edges, and uncluttered pictures. Around 12 months, share lift-the-flap books for peekaboo experiences. When toddlers are ready, choose books with paper pages and just one or two sentences per page.
3. Invite your toddler to help pick out books. And yes, it's good to read their favorites over and over again, as they will begin to recognize words.
4. Talk about the pictures—both illustrations and photographs. Ask simple “what” questions, point to words occasionally, and eventually let your child help turn pages.
5. Do not attempt to teach your child to read (no drilling or memorizing!). Your reading experiences together should always be fun.
6. When your baby makes sounds, imitate them. After repeating their sounds a few times, make new sounds for them to imitate.
7. Talk to your child during everyday activities and daily routines. Introduce new and unusual words to them.
8. Provide experiences that allow you to introduce new words to your child. For example, at the zoo or on a farm, you can introduce animal names and sounds; on a nature walk, introduce plant and insects.
9. When you are at a store, the post office, a restaurant, or any other public place, point to words on the signs that are everywhere and read them to your child.
10. Read, sing, and chant nursery rhymes with your child. Make up motions to go with.
11. Share lap rhymes, finger and hand rhymes, toe and foot rhymes, and bounce rhymes daily. Examples are “Where Is Thumbkin?” and “This Little Piggy.” If you don't know any, you can always make them up. Your child will love the interaction.
12. Sing songs with your child every day. And don't worry about singing in tune—your child doesn't care!
13. Sing songs slowly so that your child can hear the different sounds that make up each word. In children's songs, there is a distinct note for every syllable in a word, making it easier to hear those sounds.
14. Sing songs that are silly and that play with language, such as “This Old Man,” “Hickory Dickory Dock,” “Skinnamarink” (also called “Skidamarink”), and “Three Little Fishies.” Make up new songs, and sing them to familiar tunes. Add motions or act out songs.
15. Share all kinds of music styles with your child, and let him play simple instruments, such as wrist bells, shakers, rattles, or maracas.
16. Share stories with your child. Tell them stories about your family, stories about things that have happened during the day, and even made-up stories about their favorite toys or stuffed animals.
17. Share wordless books with your child, telling the story from the pictures (a young toddler can help). You can also use a photograph as the inspiration for any story.
18. Turn off the TV, and play with your child every day. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no television for children younger than two years.
19. Provide play materials and experiences that encourage the imagination, such as water play, sand play, play dough or modeling clay activities, painting, blowing bubbles, scribbling with large crayons, and pretend play.
20. When grandparents, relatives, or friends ask for gift suggestions for birthdays and other occasions, recommend books!