

# TOP

Tips on parenting



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## How to Read at Home With Young Children

by Dr. Diane C. Burts

Literacy development begins long before children enter school. Many parents are unsure of how to support their child's literacy development. Reading storybooks at home with young children is one of the most important activities for developing the knowledge required for success in reading. Even in families with minimal incomes and low levels of literacy, frequent reading of storybooks with young children positively affects their children's literacy skills.

It is never too early to begin reading books with young children - even with an infant! Recent brain research indicates that the experiences the child has in the first few days and throughout the first few years of her life have a tremendous impact on the way her brain develops. Reading to a baby stimulates her brain, strengthens existing connections, and helps her brain to form new connections.

Babies enjoy experiences with books although they interact with them in very different ways than older children. It is important to understand how children of different ages interact with books and to select books that are appropriate for the development of the child. Babies change so rapidly that a good book for a baby today might not be appropriate in a month or two. Although children of the same age are similar in many ways, each child is unique. Parents must take into account previous experiences and the individual preferences of their child in selecting books to read with them.

Reading books with young children should be a pleasant activity for both the child and the adult. It can involve the whole family - older and younger brothers and sisters and even grandparents. When you are reading with your child, take cues from him. This will help you to know what to read, how long to read, what comments to make about the book, etc. It may mean reading the same book over and over again! Although this sometimes gets tiresome for adults, repetition is very important to your child's learning. When reading books with older children, let your child sit in your lap or beside you so that she can see the words in the book. This helps your child associate the spoken word with the print. Following are other suggestions for selecting and reading books with babies and children through kindergarten age. Many of these ideas were adapted from the book, *Much More Than the ABCs*, by Judith Schickedanz (1999).

### Birth to 3 Months

*Babies this age cannot sit up without support although they can raise their heads for short periods of time. Things look fuzzy to them, and they cannot control objects with their hands. They respond to human voices (especially their parents) and like variations in speech. Interactions with books are very different during this period than they will be later on.*

continued on page 2...

## How to Read at Home With Young Children, *continued...*

- Select stiff cardboard books (with cardboard pages) that can stand up.
- Pick simple books with one large picture to a page.
- Choose books with pictures or designs that have contrasting colors such as black and white or a bold color on a white background.
- Rather than “reading” the book to your child, stand the book along the edge of his crib or on the floor while he is on his stomach so he can look at the pictures.
- Display the book so your baby can look at the book or turn away from the book when he gets tired of looking.
- Hold your baby and recite nursery rhymes, varying your voice, to introduce her to the sound patterns of words.

### 4-6 Months

*Babies learn to reach for and grasp objects during this time. They love to put things in their mouth, bang them, and wave them around. They pay attention to the pictures in books only briefly.*

- Purchase cloth and vinyl books that can be washed.
- Select books with simple, bright pictures with a contrasting background.
- Hold your baby in your lap with your arms gently around her while reading the book.
- Give your baby a toy to hold and chew on while you are reading if he grabs for the book.
- Point to and label the pictures in the book.
- Do something else when your baby loses interest in the book.

### 7-9 Months

*Babies of this age like to look at and explore objects. They can crumple and tear paper. They begin to understand the meaning of words and to babble.*

- Select small cardboard books where the next page opens automatically (© Chunky, Chubby).
- Choose books with bold illustrations that contain objects that your baby is familiar with.
- Point to, label, and talk about the objects in the book.
- Allow your child to turn the pages of the book.

- Accept your baby’s desire to “explore” the physical properties of the book.

### 9-12 Months

*Babies are active and on-the-go during this time. They are now more skillful at using their hands, but they still lack fine motor control. They become more interested in what is in the book than physically exploring it. They understand more words and begin to say words themselves.*

- Pick cardboard books with easy to turn pages.
- Select books with pictures of objects and actions that are familiar to your baby.
- Read the book when your child brings the book to you, but accept her desire to go on to other things.
- Get your child’s attention before reading by saying things like, “Look!” or “Oh! What do you think is in this book?”
- Ask simple questions such as, “What is it?” “What does it do?”
- Give your baby time to respond but give him the answer if needed.
- Expand on your child’s answer.

### 12-18 Months

*Babies can now understand and say many more words. They like to label objects and to repeat what the adult says.*

- Purchase sturdy, cardboard books that are easy for your child to handle.
- Choose books with familiar animals and other characters and objects.
- Include simple “theme” stories with no plot such as *Trucks* by Barton.
- Select books that have repetitious verses and encourage your child to chime in with a word or two as you read.
- Slow down to allow your child time to chime in.
- Point out, name, and describe objects in the pictures.
- Support your child’s desire to go get a toy or object like the one being read about in the book.

### 19-30 Months

*During this time, toddlers talk in sentences that gradually increase in complexity. They spend more time looking at books and asking why. Their lives are full of “important events” such as getting a “big girl” bed, using the big potty, going on trips, etc.*

- Select short, simple stories about things in the day to day life of your toddler.

- Purchase books that show action and events your child is familiar with.
- Choose books with little text and with pictures that closely correspond to the words.
- Include predictable books with repetition and rhyme.
- Ask your child to guess what will come next.
- Relate the book to your child’s life.
- Make story time a special part of everyday activities.
- Read shorter stories during her active times and longer stories at quieter times like bedtime.
- Accept your child’s desire to play while listening to the book being read to him.
- Change your voice to sound like the characters in the story.
- Have your child point to familiar characters as you go through the book.

### Preschool

*Preschool children are curious and like to test ideas out. They are learning to distinguish fact from fantasy and enjoy acting out situations and stories. They are curious about what words say and pay special attention to words that have meaning for them (e.g., their name, words that begin like their name). They like to experiment with language and make up silly words and words that rhyme.*

- Select books that tell a story - characters; plot; beginning, middle, and end.
- Include a variety of types of books - those that have rhyme, use repetition, poetry books, alphabet, and number books.
- Take your child to the library and bookstore to look for books.
- Read daily and establish your special story time routine.
- Read stories using expression and “voices” of the characters.
- Discuss and provide some explanation of new vocabulary words prior to reading the story or use brief explanations or synonyms for the word after you read the new word.
- Occasionally sweep your hand under the words or point out words as you read them.
- Help your child make connections between the story and things he is familiar with.

*continued ...*

- Leave out a frequently repeated word, and let your child fill it in.
- Ask your child to guess what will happen, what will come next.
- Ask open-ended questions that have more than one answer as well as questions that ask who, what, when, where, why, and how.
- Call attention to how words sound such as those that begin the same, begin like her name, and rhyme.
- While reading a rhyming book, encourage your child to make up silly words that rhyme with the words in the book.
- Encourage extension activities to stories, for example, drawing his favorite part, re-telling or acting out the story.
- Listen to your child “read” the book.
- Select a wide variety of books on topics your child is familiar with and those about new places, experiences, and situations.
- Include informational books, and encourage your child to “find out” from reading the book.
- Establish a daily reading routine.
- Make regular visits to the library and bookstore.
- Help your child use a familiar word (e.g., cat) as a strategy for figuring out a new word (e.g., mat).
- Encourage and listen to your child “read” the book.
- Provide a space for your child to read and write independently.
- Provide writing materials for your child to follow up on the story.
- Encourage your child to participate in other home activities that involve reading and writing. ☺

## Kindergarten

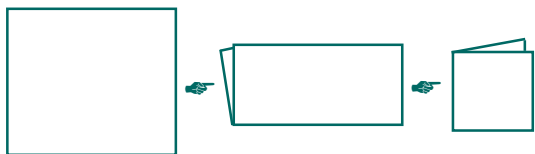
Kindergarten children are usually very verbal and carry on interesting conversations with adults and with friends. They have broadening interests and are eager to learn. They ask many questions and will use books as one source to get their questions answered.

~Dr. Diane Burts has taught pre-K, kindergarten, primary, special education, and university students. She conducts research and publishes in the area of developmentally appropriate practices.

## activity corner

### Pointed Top Hat

1. Fold a 17" by 17" square piece of paper in half, and then half again:



2. Take a SINGLE fold of corner A and fold back to corner X:



3. Take the other 3 folds (one from A and two from B) and fold back in the opposite direction. You now have a triangle shape.

4. Spread apart paper in opening on the side opposite from the point:



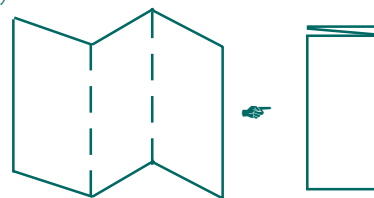
5. Open the center for your hat and proudly wear! For an even neater hat, use wrapping paper or decorate the paper yourself before creating the hat.



### Paper Dolls



1. Fold a sheet of paper back and forth on dotted lines as shown (each fold will be on the opposite side of the previous fold):



2. Draw the desired figure on the paper, and be sure that a point on each fold is not cut (in the example drawing, the hands are connected). Cut out your drawing.



3. Gently unfold the paper to reveal your connected figures:



4. Color and decorate your paper dolls!

## Encouraging Your Child to Write

by Sylvia Read

We all know we should read to our children, but we may not realize that our children can learn a lot about language through writing. Long before their writing is spelled and punctuated correctly, children use writing to express their ideas, tell a story, communicate a message, and, often, to play.



A child's note reminding me to bring the "book about cats."

Many children write before they read. They play around with writing using scribbles and perhaps random letters to represent "real" writing. Drawings are an early form of writing as well. When asked to tell about a drawing, many children tell an elaborate story. Eventually they will begin to represent the beginning sounds of words. ILMM might be read, "I love my mom." They can read their writing long before they can read words in a book. Writing is important on its own, but it is also a natural way to begin the process of learning to read.

### Make Writing Materials Available

Magnetic letters and letter puzzles can familiarize your child with the shape of letters. Writing simple words with magnetic letters on the refrigerator such as mom, dad, names of siblings, and the child's own name is a powerful way to learn letter names and the sounds they make.

You can encourage your child to write by providing paper and writing utensils. Very young children should begin with plain paper and pencils, markers, or crayons. If you have a chalkboard or whiteboard, children enjoy experimenting with chalk and dry erase markers. Water painted on a hot sidewalk, marks in the sand or dirt, or letters on a Magna Doodle are intriguing temporary forms of writing.



A child's label for her picture:  
"My picture of my Christmas tree."

### Model Writing

It is very important to model writing for your child. Writing simple notes to your child can lead to learning. Tuck a sticky note into a lunch box with a message such as "We love you" or "See you soon!" Leave a note on your child's pillow that he or she can discover in the morning.

When you write thank you notes, have your child watch and help you write. Then she or he can sign the note, too. With a little help and encouragement, your child can write thank you notes for birthday and holiday gifts.

Model letter writing to friends and family so that your child can see you do it. If you keep a journal or have family stories that you've written, these should be shared with children.

### Provide Writing Opportunities

There are many kinds of home activities that can encourage writing. You might have a young child write the grocery list. The child can record the initial consonants of words. For example, GB for green beans. Perhaps the child can hear beginning and ending sounds and might be able to write MK for milk. This kind of temporary spelling is an important part of the learning process.

When our daughter was young, we made treasure hunts for her to read. We wrote simple clues and helped her to read them. At the end of five or six clues she found her bear or doll. After making a few treasure hunts for her, she wanted to make them for us. She drew a picture for the treasure and wrote a series of three or four clues to help us find the treasure. She got a great deal of satisfaction out of our searching.

Drawing pictures and writing on them for grandparents and other favorite friends or relatives is another powerful way for children to experience the joy of writing. It is especially effective if the child gets a reply. With email, children can write or dictate messages and receive replies quickly.



A child's treasure hunt clue:  
"Look behind the heater."

continued ...

Typewriters and computers are other tools for children to use to experiment with writing. Even the oldest machines allow a child to type letters or words and see them instantly appear.

Children can be encouraged to add writing to drawings and even to write books. By providing paper that can be stapled together, children can practice being authors. This can flow naturally out of many experiences with children's books. Many of their drawings and books will take on the form of a caption book where objects of interest are labeled.

### What If My Child Isn't Interested?

If the time, materials, and opportunity to write are available, and your child shows no interest, don't worry. Most often children's writing is self-initiated. They decide what and when to write. They may show interest in writing for a while, and then abandon it for a long period of time. This is normal. Also, though encouragement is good, making assignments to write, especially in the form of tracing, copying, or drilling, usually doesn't work, unless children choose to do these activities on their own.

Each time they write, children incorporate more knowledge into their existing understanding of writing. They learn that writing carries meaning, that writing is used to communicate, and most of all, that writing can bring joy to the writer and the audience. ☺

~Sylvia Read is a parent and teacher at Edith Bowen Laboratory School in Logan, Utah. Her most rewarding moments happen when she helps children grow as writers.

## Question Corner



"When disciplining infants, is it possible to spoil them too much? Each time my daughter cries or is upset, I feel compelled to pick her up and hold her!"

~ Hazel in Utah

Thanks for asking such a pertinent question, Hazel. I bet that most parents think about this at least once or twice during their parenting adventures. First of all, it is not possible to spoil an infant, child, or teenager with too much love! When you hold, caress, and soothe a young infant, the message they're getting is "Here's a person who loves and cares for me and makes me feel secure."

Secondly, studies have shown that from birth through the first half year of life, if infants are held when they signal (usually through crying) that they need love and assurance, they usually cry less often during the second half of their first year of life (from 6 months to 12 months) than infants who have not had that consistent holding and touching and loving when they're upset.

However, all of this does not mean that you should ignore your own feelings. Sometimes, you may feel too frustrated and worn out by other things in your life or by your child's crying to pick up your baby or to hold her even one minute longer, and that's okay. When that happens, just give your baby a hug and a kiss, tell her that you're sorry you can't help her feel better, put her down in her crib, and leave the room. Of course, if you have to do this often, you may need to look at why your life is so stressed and try to change some things, but everyone has to do this once in a while.

When you are feeling calm and contented, always try to give your infant the cuddling, reassurance, and socialization that she seems to be "asking" for. Try to find

things to do with your infant that you both like. For example, some infants like to be "danced" around the floor to music, others like to look at picture books and hear their mother's voice reading to them. Others like to be carried in a backpack and taken for walks around the neighborhood, house, or yard. If you try to find some activities that you both find soothing and if you try to cuddle and reassure your child when you feel you are emotionally able, then during those times when you need to put some space between you and your crying baby you'll feel okay about doing so. Try to realize that your child is, after all, being raised by a mere mortal who is trying to do her very best.

Best wishes to you! Having five children of my own, I know that you are in a very frustrating and demanding stage of child-rearing but also in a stage than can be very happy and a lot of fun! ☺

~Dr. Ann Austin, Associate Dean of the College of Family Life at Utah State University

**question corner** features questions posed by parents to early childhood experts who provide brief responses in this newsletter. If you have any questions you would like answered, please send e-mail to [EEJCENTER@COE.USU.EDU](mailto:EEJCENTER@COE.USU.EDU) or mail to EEJ Center for Early Childhood Education • Utah State University • 6515 Old Main Hill • Logan UT 84322-6515.

## Quality in Child Care: What Should Parents Look For?

by Dr. Joan Benedict

When parents must find child care (day care) for their child, how do they know it is good care or, as it is called, “quality care?” It is important to think about where and with whom you are leaving your child because the length of your day’s work plus the time it takes to get to the center before work and pick up your child after work typically amounts to eight to ten hours a day. This is most of your child’s wakeful hours. So, looking for quality care is very important for your child’s happiness, security, and development. It also provides you, the parent, with the peace of mind that comes with knowing your child is well cared for despite your absence.

First, it is good to know that child care in “high quality” centers or family day care homes can be an appropriate alternative to your care. Most current research indicates that it is not harmful to your child and does not interfere with your relationship or the love that your child feels for you. Center care is usually a place that enrolls at least eight to ten children, and up to as many as a hundred or more children. A family day care home is where individuals open their home to care for a small number of

children. When caregivers appropriately respond to your child’s needs throughout the day, the care is described as “high quality” in both types of settings.

Second, good care is related to the number of people caring for a group of children, which is known as staff-child ratio. This is an important factor related to the quality of care. The number varies depending upon the ages of the children in the group. In a family day care home, at least two people need to be available at all times in case of an emergency where one caregiver has to leave to get help for a sick or hurt child. In a center, there are more than two people caring for children and if the center is large enough there is a director and a cook who are available for emergencies. The size of the group of children in a room is also an important consideration because of the amount of time that a caregiver can spend with an individual child, taking care of the child’s physical needs or talking with and guiding the play of the child.

Third, the training of the adults taking care of children is related to the kind of care they are giving. The training of the caregivers

continued ...



### question corner

“My husband and I are ready to start our family and many of our friends tell us that we should plan our children’s births in the summer so they don’t have to wait until they are almost 6 years old to go to school. What do you think about this?”

~Jennifer in Colorado

Most states require children to be 5 years old when they enter kindergarten. Cutoff dates vary from state to state but are usually within a month of the first day of school. Thus, children who are born in May through early September are the youngest children in the class. Because they are several months younger than children who have birthdays in the fall months, they are also developmentally younger. For example, they may not run or talk as well as their older classmates, or they may not have as keen an interest in books as older classmates. An age difference of six to ten months is a lot of time for a 5 or 6 year old.

When younger children are compared to older children, they often appear to be developmentally delayed (behind their age mates) when they are actually just younger. Most teachers understand that children who have just turned 5 years old have not reached the same developmental level as those who are almost 6. However, there are those teachers who will label younger children as developmentally delayed and this can lead to inappropriate practices such as retention in kindergarten and low expectations for the child.

In regard to planning your family, I would suggest you not let this issue dictate your timing. However, if you do have a younger child, just be aware that you and the teachers must maintain appropriate expectations for your son or daughter throughout school. In addition, seek out resources (e.g., your pediatrician, books, this newsletter) that will assist you in providing a home environment that supports your child’s healthy development. ☺

~Martha T. Dever, Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education at Utah State University

can range from those who have attended college or vocational schools and studied about how to care for or teach young children to those who have attended special classes approved by the state. Training helps caregivers know what is appropriate to do with infants, toddlers, and young children. States require classes about health and safety of children.

When a center or family day care home has their license to operate displayed where parents can see it, they can be assured that at least some training has been accomplished by the caregivers.

Following is a list of items that parents can look for or ask about when deciding if the child care setting is “quality” or good for their child whether he or she is an infant, toddler, or preschooler.

### Infant Care (ages 6 weeks to 18 months)

- One caregiver is with three or four infants in a group setting.
- No more than two infants should be in a family day care setting where seven children are present.
- Caregivers follow the infant’s schedule for feeding and sleeping.
- Caregivers hold bottles when feeding each child. No bottles are propped.
- Infants do not spend more than thirty minutes in their beds awake.
- Space to play on the floor is provided with many interesting things to look at and safe toys with which to play.
- Outside time is planned according to the schedules of the infants. Extra help is available when a caregiver takes an infant outside.
- Infants are allowed to form a close relationship with one primary caregiver who consistently cares for him or her. In some centers, caregivers are caring for the same children for more than one or two years, changing the room to meet the growth of the children. This is called “continuous care” and allows for strong relationships to grow, just as families have strong relationships.

### Toddler Care (18 months to 3 years)

- Four to six toddlers are with a caregiver with no more than twelve children in a room.

- No more than two toddlers make up part of the group in a family day care home.
- Toddlers are encouraged to form a close relationship with a caregiver. Continuing with their same caregiver as when starting in childcare as an infant is recommended.
- Enough play materials are available to keep toddlers interest and attention both indoors and outdoors.
- More than one of each toy is available since toddlers usually want the same toy and are not yet able to share one toy.
- Toilet learning is accomplished only as each individual child shows signs of readiness.
- The schedule stays the same throughout the day to help toddlers feel secure although it is flexible enough to consider the needs of individual children.

### Preschool Care (3 years through 5 years)

- Three-year-olds are in groups not larger than sixteen children with two caregivers.
- Four-year-olds are in groups not larger than twenty children with two caregivers.
- Five-year-olds can be in a group as large as twenty-five with two adults.
- Teachers (caregivers) plan the day for activities both indoors and outdoors.
- In a center, the rooms are set up into play areas such as block building, home center, puzzles, books, art activity, and other areas that the teachers arrange from time to time.
- A schedule for the day is displayed and parents can tell what topic or theme the children are studying such as farm animals or community helpers.
- Most of the day is spent in small group play with certain times for whole group activity involving stories, music, or sharing about the theme.
- Children are allowed lots of time to express themselves through talk with teachers and with other children.
- In a family day care home, some space should be available for older preschoolers to use toys and learning materials without the infants and toddlers interference just

as brothers and sisters in their own homes have spaces of their own.

Policies for children of all ages in child care settings should include procedures for dealing with the spread of contagious diseases, such as when to keep a sick child at home, and procedures to follow when a child becomes ill at the center. Usually a child should be free of fever for twenty-four hours before returning to child care.

“It is good to know that child care in “high quality” centers or family day care homes can be an appropriate alternative to your care. Most current research indicates that it is not harmful to your child and does not interfere with your relationship or the love that your child feels for you.”

Another issue for parents to find out about is the discipline policy. Is corporal punishment (spanking) administered to children? This is an area of importance for parents. Methods of discipline used in child care should be close to the family’s method of discipline so the child

will not be confused. Corporal punishment is not recommended by child development specialists.

In both family day care homes and child care centers, the staff should look happy and enjoy caring for children. It is important for the staff to enjoy the children as they grow and learn new things about their world. Relationships between the staff and the parents should be warm and friendly. This helps the children feel happy and secure. Finding the best care for young children is an important job for parents. Knowing that this has been accomplished helps grow strong families. ☺

~Joan Benedict, Ph.D., is a mother, former child care director, and preschool teacher. She is currently the director of the Louisiana State University Laboratory Preschool in the School of Human Ecology.



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