

Language & Learning

Read With Me

Reading With Young Children Learning Spoken Language

Start right away. Story time is the time to stay close and communicate about something that is interesting and exciting. Story time also is a time for baby to listen with amplification and begin to make sense of sound. Early books call for parents' voices to go up and down, loud and soft, squeaky and smooth. Early books have animal noises, and vehicle noises, and funny voices. All of the different kinds of listening practice that will help your baby develop speech sounds and voice control are present when you are reading books. It is not the only time that you will communicate and your baby will listen, but it is a very important time.

Keep the book visible and your face visible. Give your baby or your toddler a chance to look at the book and then look at you if speechreading is part of your communication mode. You can cue your baby to focus on your face or on the book by pointing, or changing your voice suddenly. To do this, you will need to sit in the corner of a couch, or with your baby diagonally in your lap, with the book slightly to the side. Sometimes, your baby will be able to look at the book and listen to you at the same time, especially as books become familiar. That is exciting, too.

Encourage your baby to communicate about the book. What is your baby looking at, or pointing to, or trying to say about a picture? Because we rarely read books just once, your baby will gradually begin to repeat favorite words and phrases, or correct you if you forget them or say them wrong. Communicating about stories and picture books is one of the great pleasures of reading to our babies and children. It also is an important part of developing literate language for later reading in school.

Deaf and hard-of-hearing babies learning spoken language need to experience books in a quiet environment. They need to hear the words, sounds and stories again and again. While you are reading, your baby is working hard to make sense out of sounds that may be very soft or incomplete, but the work is fun. Mom or Dad is paying attention and doing interesting things with sound. The more you read together, the more your baby can practice listening.