

Language & Learning

Read With Me

Reasons for Reading With Young Children Who Are Hard of Hearing

Reading to your baby from birth, is important. Hearing, deaf, and hard of hearing babies need to be read to very early for many of the same reasons.

Reading encourages babies to enjoy books. When your baby holds a cloth or plastic book, the first place it goes may be in his mouth. That's okay. That is why the book is cloth or plastic. If you hold your baby and turn the pages, the bright objects and shapes there will get the baby's attention. Infants like to look close up at edges, stripes and blocks of color from the day they are born. Gradually, the books will be less like other toys and more like books. They will have cardboard pages, and a word of text here and there besides the pictures. The time you spend together with these toys can be very special.

Reading together engages your baby in communication. Books have pictures to point at. They have pages to open and close. A baby probably will have one or two dolls, a set of soft blocks, or a playpen busy box, but you can provide a lot of books, each one different. When babies are very small, books that can go into the bathtub or into the mouth can follow them everywhere. As babies gain control over their fingers, books with pages to turn are fascinating. When babies are old enough not to swallow the pieces, books with buttons and zippers or soft fur on some of the animal characters are a lot of fun. Every action is a chance to communicate about what your baby is doing or looking at. Even before you are reading stories, you are letting your baby know that books have messages.

Reading helps your baby learn early about stories. Nursery rhymes, finger plays, even peek-a-boo are very short stories. Babies enjoy watching you do, sign, or say these stories long before they understand the meaning. Knowing about stories means that later babies will expect and enjoy stories about things happened in the past, might happen in the future. That kind of language will be important later on, when your baby reaches school, reads captions, or wants to tell a story on his own. Stories are part of what is called literate language.

Some day, your baby will find print everywhere in dictionaries, magazines, letters, books about facts, and books of fairy tales, etc.. That print is all around your baby, waiting to be noticed. When you read your shopping list in the grocery store, you can read it together. When Grandma sends a birthday card, you can both enjoy it. At the same time, your baby will find variety in books. The plastic book about toys and the cloth book about animals will have labels, but no story. The cardboard book about the itchy-bitsy spider will have pictures to show what is happening. From reading with you, your baby can learn to expect different information or entertainment from different kinds of print.