



## Books, Baby Babbles, and You!

Early language and literacy skills begin at birth, but not as the traditional reading and writing envisioned for the four years and up age group. Instead, emergent literacy skills are needed before children learn to read and write. These skills become the early puzzle pieces that form the first border of the bigger picture of literacy. The literacy puzzle will be incomplete without these emergent skills.

### **What about the babies? What language and literacy skills are they born with?**

Infants are pre-wired at birth to begin communication with others. During infancy, brain development is occurring at the fastest rate ever in the lifetime of the child. Responsive, caring parents/caregivers are critical in the development of these skills for infants and toddlers. Infants tell us what they want by communicating through cries, facial expressions, and movements. They anticipate that parents/caregivers will translate these cues and respond in loving ways to meet their needs.

### **What is emergent literacy for infants and toddlers?**

Literacy refers to reading and writing skills. Emergent literacy refers to everything that these children have learned about communication, verbal and non-verbal language as well as



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reading and writing. It includes all the experiences that children have had with conversations, stories, books and print right from birth. It is a cognitive skill that develops simultaneously with infant and toddler social and emotional development. It is dependant upon relationships.

Appropriate language and literacy skills will look different for infants and toddlers. Language can be built by practicing simple songs and rhymes, doing finger plays, taking turns and sharing conversations with children right from the beginning. Using conversation to revisit the day's

activities allows children to interpret and tell their own story about the day. Photos that highlight daily events, family and friends, add to daily conversation and help children anticipate what comes next. Early literacy skills include physically exploring books, looking at and recognizing familiar stories, as well as comprehending pictures and knowing what comes next. Having conversations with children about a book encourages children to share their thoughts about a story. Reading experiences should be part of every child's daily schedule. Allow older toddlers to write and draw, make books,

and share their own stories. This leads to strong storytelling skills.

Development of these skills provides yet another reason why responsive, caring relationships are so important. The stronger the emotional bond, the stronger a child's motivation for learning. These experiences will provide a window on the new world of infancy and gradually add to the puzzle picture. Since competency in communication, language, and literacy develops through adult interactions—there is never a set curriculum. Caregivers must set the pace by following the child's lead and interests.

Strategies for early language and literacy include maintaining a loving and supportive environment for infants and toddlers. Their environment should be print rich, using words and pictures to help communicate new ideas and language to children. Real life photos of family and animals help children build knowledge about the world around them. Books should meet certain criteria: availability, made of cloth and cardboard, as well as represent the diversity of the family cultures present. Allow children to explore books through their whole body, even if mouthing the book will eventually ruin it. Slow down and take time to talk with children. Allow infants and toddlers to enjoy lap reading experiences that will build strong relationships. Never hesitate to read the same favorite book over and over again, as children enjoy all forms of rhyme and repetition. Babies will let you know when they are bored and

ready to choose another story.

Infants and toddlers work hard to explore and discover their new world. They depend on the special people in their lives to help them understand as they observe daily events and learn simple stories. The majority of their learning occurs through every day interactions and routines with caring adults. Babies use these experiences to make meaning of their life and their family culture. When babies bravely explore safe environments that were planned just for them, caregivers help children discover more puzzle pieces to add to what they already know, and help children become their own storytellers.