

Reading to infants provides good base for literacy

I'm a new mom, and I always thought I would enjoy reading to my baby from day one. But I find I feel silly reading to him (he's now 6 weeks old), because it's obvious he doesn't yet understand the story. Should I keep at it, or wait until he's older?

Early childhood experts say it's never too early to begin reading to your infant.

Especially at this early stage, you don't need to worry about reading for long periods of time — even a few minutes is OK.

The important thing is to find different ways to stimulate your son's understanding of language. Talking, singing and reading aloud, as well as using other sounds, facial expressions and gestures, will help provide a solid foundation for communication and literacy.

Many experts recommend using a wide vocabulary when talking with your infant. Sure, he may not be able to comprehend what you're saying, but the idea is to expose young children to new words at an early age, when the brain is developing at a rapid pace.

Using different voices for different characters — whether you're reading a fairy tale or an item in the newspaper — can help keep the child's interest even if for just a short time.

Take the time to point out pictures in the book and explain what they depict. Even very young babies enjoy that kind of interaction.



The benefits of reading to infants are multiple. According to the nonprofit Zero to Three National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families (<http://www.zerotothree.org>), reading to infants helps provide a foundation for many areas of development, including:

- Narrative understanding, or stringing together meaningful ideas as a story. Such an understanding provides a sound basis for helping children learn to read and communicate.
- Social-emotional development. Reading to your infant provides a way to develop a strong, warm relationship between you and your child.
- Appreciation for reading. When a loving adult reads to an infant, the experience provides an early association between reading and pleasure.

For infants and young toddlers, Zero to Three recommends books with simple, large pictures or designs with bright colors. Use books published for young children — stiff cardboard or fold-out books that can be propped up in a crib, or cloth or soft vinyl books that can go into the bath (and get washed). Your baby will probably want to chew on the books a lot once he reaches that stage of development. Don't worry — that's perfectly normal. And, of course, it's one reason why baby books are so sturdy.

Family Fundamentals is a monthly column on family issues. It is a service of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to *Family Fundamentals*, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



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Dear Subscriber: This column was reviewed by Kristen Corry, family and consumer sciences educator with Ohio State University Extension, the outreach arm of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences.

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