

Reading with Babies Matters!

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During her lunch break, Sasha visits the infant room to nurse her 5-month-old daughter, Emma. She notices Anat, Emma’s caregiver, reading the photo book Sasha made when she first enrolled Emma in the center. Emma is sitting in Anat’s lap along with another infant, and she is paying close attention to the pictures of her family. Anat says to Emma, “Here is your mommy in the book, and look—here is your mommy at the door ready to feed you!” Emma looks up and smiles when she sees Sasha. Anat realized early on that if she reads to Emma, it makes waiting for her mom to come by a little easier. Now, Anat is starting to read to the infants throughout the day, as she is finding that they enjoy the illustrations and the way she gives each character a unique voice.

In the child care center in the opening vignette, each family is asked to make a book of photos featuring the most important people in their child’s life. These photo books, along with board books, are found in a basket located in a cozy reading corner, where there are a few pillows for teachers to sit on and read to the children throughout the day. Even though the children in this room are under a year old, the teachers know how important it is to share books, stories, and songs with them. As a result, they have intentionally incorporated reading into their daily routines with the children.

For years, researchers have shown that reading to infants is good for their language and cognitive

development and is important for building children’s vocabulary and prereading skills. A recent study demonstrated that both the quality and the quantity of shared reading in infancy are predictive of children’s vocabulary, reading skills, and name-writing ability at age 4 (AAP 2017). But many adults wonder what is considered quality shared reading. A key factor is being conversational while reading aloud, including talking about and labeling pictures and characters’ emotions (AAP 2017).

Many educators want to engage the littlest learners in books, but infant and toddler settings are very busy places—especially infant rooms when all of the children are under 12 months old. So much time is spent performing the routine care of feeding, diapering, and sleeping that reading can get lost if teachers are not intentional about incorporating it into the day.

Here are some tips that can make reading easier for you and more beneficial for the infants and toddlers in your care.

- › Make books readily accessible to both you and mobile babies by placing several baskets or trays of books on the floor in different locations around the room.
- › Make books part of daily routines, such as when lulling a baby to sleep or feeding a baby.
- › Invite families to make homemade books featuring familiar family members, including pets. (This also makes for a great family engagement activity to do at your center so that you can involve families that may not be able to afford their own craft supplies.)
- › Read aloud in a casual, conversational manner, pausing to point to the illustrations and label the objects and characters.

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