



# Getting Ready to Read: Helping Your Child Become a Confident Reader and Writer Starting from Birth



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ZERO TO THREE is a national, nonprofit organization that informs, trains and supports professionals, policy makers and parents in their efforts to improve the lives of infants and toddlers.

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# Getting Ready to Read: Helping Your Child Become a Confident Reader and Writer Starting from Birth



- ✓ You are the most important person in your child's life.
- ✓ You help her learn from the day she is born.
- ✓ When you love your baby, make her feel safe, and play with her, she feels special and nurtured.
- ✓ When you care for your baby this way, she will develop a sense of self-confidence. Your baby will believe that she can take on new challenges that come her way. This helps her learn to read and write when she is bigger!

# Babies: Birth to 12 Months



Babies:

- ✓ Show what they are thinking and feeling by using their sounds, facial expressions, and body movements.
- ✓ Learn to be good communicators when their caregivers respond to their sounds and actions.
- ✓ Learn by playing.
- ✓ Learn to love books and reading when their caregivers read to them often.

## Babies: Birth to 12 Months

What's Going on for Your Baby	What You Can Do
<p><b>I am communicating with you from day one.</b> I use my cries and sounds, facial expressions, and body movements to tell you what I need.</p>	<p><b>Watch your baby.</b> What patterns do you see in his sounds and movements? How does he tell you he is happy, hungry, or tired?</p> <p><b>Respond to your baby's signals.</b> If he shows you he is unhappy, comfort him. If he points to something, show it to him. Tell him what it is.</p>
<p><b>By 3 months, I babble a lot.</b> When someone talks to me, I make sounds back.</p> <p><b>I may not be talking, but I'm listening.</b> That's how I learn to speak.</p>	<p><b>Talk with your baby.</b> Your baby loves to hear your voice. Copy your baby's sounds and listen to see what sounds she makes in response.</p>
<p><b>I am figuring out how things work.</b> I explore books and toys with my eyes, hands, and mouth. This helps me figure out what they are and what they do.</p> <p><b>Reading, playing games, talking, laughing, and cuddling</b> with you makes me feel so good and is so much fun.</p>	<p><b>Play with your baby.</b> Children learn by touching, banging, shaking, mouthing, dropping, and rolling their toys.</p> <p><b>Find books and toys</b> that your baby can: shake and make sounds with, mouth and grab, touch and squeeze.</p> <p><b>Sing songs and play simple games like "peek-a-boo."</b> Having fun together is the best way to help your child learn.</p>
<p><b>I love hearing your voice</b> and sitting curled up in your lap when you read with me.</p> <p><b>Reading and talking together helps me learn new words.</b> By the time I'm 1 year old, I may even be using one or two words of my own.</p>	<p><b>Read together every day.</b> It's never too early to read to your baby. Sharing books helps your baby develop a love of reading.</p>

# Young Toddlers: 12-24 Months



Young toddlers:

- ✓ Are using more sounds and actions to let you know what they are thinking and feeling.
- ✓ Are also learning to say many new words.
- ✓ Benefit from hearing stories that help them learn the meaning of words. Stories also help toddlers develop a love of reading.
- ✓ Can put together a few words, like “Mama, up?”



## Young Toddlers: 12-24 Months

What's Going on for Your Toddler	What You Can Do
<p><b>I still use my sounds, face, and body to tell you what I need and how I'm feeling.</b> When you understand my signals, I feel loved and special.</p>	<p><b>Encourage your child to use sounds and actions to communicate with you.</b> Ask her to point to the toy she wants or wave good-bye to Grandma.</p>
<p><b>My babbles are slowly turning into words this year.</b> By the time I'm 2, I may be using between 20 and 50 words. You might even hear me put two words together to make a sentence like: "Want milk!"</p> <p><b>I know it is hard to understand me sometimes.</b> And sometimes I get really frustrated when you don't understand what I'm saying. Thanks for sticking with me and trying to figure it out.</p>	<p><b>Talk together.</b> Say the names of things you see. Talk about what you are doing together. The more your toddler talks with you, the more he will learn.</p> <p><b>Pay attention when your child talks.</b> This lets him know that he is a good communicator. It's okay to say: "I'm sorry but I don't understand. Can you show me?"</p>
<p><b>I understand so many more words than I can speak.</b> That's why I love it when you talk with me. It is so fun and helpful to hear what you have to say.</p>	<p><b>Make stories and books part of your family's everyday routines:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Read your favorite children's book with your child.</li> <li>✓ Tell her stories—about the squirrels outside, her stuffed animals, or where the city bus is going.</li> <li>✓ Look through a photo album and tell stories about the people she is seeing.</li> <li>✓ Follow your child's lead. She will show you which stories, books, and pictures she likes best.</li> </ul>
<p><b>I am starting to have very strong opinions about things.</b> I know what I like and don't like.</p>	<p><b>Give your child choices when possible:</b> "Would you like an apple or banana for a snack?" "Which book would you like to read tonight before bed?" This will build your child's confidence that he can make good choices.</p>

# Older Toddlers: 24-36 Months



Older toddlers:

- ✓ Are learning how to pretend. This is a very important skill. It builds their imagination and thinking skills.
- ✓ Can put words together to share their thoughts and feelings.
- ✓ Are learning how ideas are connected. For example, “If I go outside in the rain, I will get wet.” This is the reason they ask “Why?” all the time!



## Older Toddlers: 24-36 Months

What's Going on for Your Toddler	What You Can Do
<b>I am learning how to see the world from another person's point of view.</b> I can imagine how a puppy might act or pretend to drive a car.	<b>Play pretend with your child.</b> Let your child's imagination go wild! Encourage her to make up and act out her own stories. This builds her language and thinking skills.
<b>My language skills are growing by leaps and bounds!</b> I am learning new words every day. I am using sentences to talk with you. By the time I am 3, I may know up to 900 words.	<p><b>Build on what your child says.</b> If he says, "More milk," you might say, "You want some more milk." This teaches him new words and how to put sentences together.</p> <p><b>Tell each other stories.</b> And sing songs. This will help your child learn new words. And don't forget to keep on reading!</p>
<b>I am becoming a great problem-solver.</b> I am figuring out how things work, like how to unroll the toilet paper.	<b>Ask your child questions.</b> This helps her learn how ideas are connected. Ask why she thinks the sky is blue or birds chirp. Having the right answer is not important! Just get her thinking.
<b>I like to play the same thing again and again until I've "got it."</b> Thanks for playing puzzles with me for the millionth time.	<b>Children need lots of chances to practice.</b> Be patient. You may need to answer the same questions, read the same books, and play the same games over and over again. Children learn through repetition.
<b>I am starting to become interested in writing.</b> I am beginning to understand that letters and words have meaning. I enjoy scribbling my own "words" with crayons and markers.	<b>Scribble and draw pictures together.</b> Let your child play with crayons, markers, paint, and chalk. Have him tell you about his picture. Hang his picture up. This builds your child's confidence as a writer.

# Preschoolers: 3-5 Years



## Preschoolers:

- ✓ Begin to understand that words are for sharing ideas and information.
- ✓ Understand stories with plots. And they can tell you stories with a beginning, middle, and end.
- ✓ Imitate adult writing by scribbling. They make lines, squiggles, and circles.
- ✓ Are figuring out how sounds make up words. They are also learning the shapes and names of letters.

## Preschoolers: 3-5 Years

### What's Going on for Your Preschooler

### What You Can Do

**I am starting to recognize different letters –** especially the ones in my name. I am also beginning to connect a letter with the sound it makes.

**I might even recognize and “read” some common words I see a lot,** like the word STOP on the sign at the corner.

**Point to words as the two of you read together.** Help your child identify familiar letters. Show him that these letters spell important words, like his own name.

**Help your child see words in the world around him.** Point out street signs, “open/closed” signs in stores, or the “men/women” signs on restrooms. You can even read the labels of the food you eat: “Here it says *orange juice*.”

**Now that I understand and recognize more words, I love playing games with them.**

**Have fun with language!** Play games like:

- Changing the words to songs you know to make them silly (*Happy Potty-Break to You!*).
- Rhyming words together (*Cat sounds like bat, and so do mat and hat*).
- Saying as many words that start with the same sound as you can think of (*stick, sun, snow, Saturday, sled*).

**I am able to guess what might happen in a story based on the pictures.** I can talk about how a character might feel in a story or even think up a new ending to a story. I can also connect the story to something I’ve experienced in my own life. I might tell you about my pet fish after reading a story about fish.

**Help your child think about what is happening in a story.** Ask her what she thinks will happen next, or have her tell the story to you using the pictures as a guide.

**Read your child picture books with more words.** Choosing longer, more involved stories helps your child develop listening skills. Your child also learns how a story is organized with a beginning, middle, and end.

## Preschoolers: 3-5 Years *continued*

What's Going on for Your Preschooler	What You Can Do
<p><b>I am developing more control over my hands and fingers.</b> This means that I am getting better at using pens, markers, and crayons.</p> <p><b>I am just beginning to learn how to write letters.</b> But I feel really grown-up when you let me practice with a pen and paper.</p>	<p><b>Write together.</b> Help your child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Write his own story.</li><li>✓ Tell you a story that you write down for him.</li><li>✓ Write a letter to a family member or a friend or neighbor.</li><li>✓ Help you make a shopping list.</li></ul> <p>These writing activities help your child understand that letters and words have meaning. Writing also develops the small muscles in your child's fingers and hands.</p>
<p><b>I can think through questions and come up with my own answers.</b> You make me feel so smart and important when you ask what I think and feel about things.</p>	<p><b>Help your child problem-solve.</b> Play a “what if” game. For example, ask your child, “what would happen if ...” You can fill in the blank with anything: “What if the garbage truck stopped coming?” Give your child lots of time to answer. This helps her build the thinking skills she will need to express her ideas in school.</p>

## Good Choices for Children's Books: Special Stories for Babies, Toddlers, and Preschoolers

There are hundreds, if not thousands, of enjoyable, engaging books for young children aged birth to 5. The list below outlines just a few of the many wonderful stories you can discover together with your child. Enjoy!

- ✓ Big Fat Hen (Baker)
- ✓ Barnyard Dance (Boynton)
- ✓ Big Red Barn (Brown)
- ✓ Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? (Martin & Carle)
- ✓ The Bunnies Are Not in Their Beds (Russo)
- ✓ Busy! (Kubler)
- ✓ Caps for Sale (Slobodkina)
- ✓ Cars and Trucks and Things That Go (Scarry)
- ✓ Chugga Chugga Choo Choo (Lewis)
- ✓ Cock-a-Doodle-Do: A Farmyard Counting Book (Lavis)
- ✓ Dinosaur Roar! (Stickland & Stickland)
- ✓ Don't Go (Breskin Zalben)
- ✓ Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus (Willems)
- ✓ Duck in the Truck (Alborough)
- ✓ Eating the Alphabet (Ehlert)
- ✓ Freight Train (Crews)
- ✓ From Head to Toe (Carle)
- ✓ A Good Day (Henkes)
- ✓ Good Dog, Carl (Day)
- ✓ Good Job, Little Bear (Waddell)
- ✓ Goodnight Moon (Brown)
- ✓ Gossie and Gertie (Dunrea)
- ✓ Harold and the Purple Crayon (Johnson)

- ✓ The Hello, Goodbye Window (Juster)
- ✓ “Hi, Pizza Man!” (Walter)
- ✓ How Are You Peeling? Foods With Moods (Freymann & Elffers)
- ✓ Hush Little Baby (Long)
- ✓ I Like Myself! (Beaumont)
- ✓ I STINK! (McMullan & McMullan)
- ✓ I Went Walking (Williams)
- ✓ In the Small, Small Pond (Fleming)
- ✓ It’s Okay to Be Different (Parr)
- ✓ Jamberry (Degen)
- ✓ Jazz Man (Ehrhardt)
- ✓ Jesse Bear, What Will You Wear? (Carlstrom)
- ✓ Joshua James Likes Trucks (Petrie)
- ✓ The Kissing Hand (Penn)
- ✓ Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Tale (Willems)
- ✓ The Little Red Hen (Galdone)
- ✓ Los Pollitos Dicen / The Baby Chicks Are Singing (Wolff)
- ✓ Where Is Maisy? A Lift-the-Flap Book (Cousins)
- ✓ Mama Cat Has Three Kittens (Fleming)
- ✓ Moo, Baa, La La La (Boynton)
- ✓ The Napping House (Wood)
- ✓ No, David! (Shannon)
- ✓ Olivia (Falconer)
- ✓ One Cow, Moo Moo! (Bennett)
- ✓ Owl Babies (Waddell)
- ✓ Peep! (Luthard)
- ✓ Please, Baby, Please (Lee & Lee)



- ✓ The Red Book (Lehman)
- ✓ Salamander Room (Mazer)
- ✓ The Snowy Day (Keats)
- ✓ The Scrubbly Bubbly Car Wash (O’Garden)
- ✓ Sheep in a Jeep (Shaw)
- ✓ Te Amo, Bebe, Little One (Wheeler)
- ✓ Ten Red Apples (Hutchins)
- ✓ There Was An Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly (Taback)
- ✓ Trashy Town (Zimmerman)
- ✓ The Very Hungry Caterpillar (Carle)
- ✓ We’re Going on a Bear Hunt (Rosen)
- ✓ What Do You Do With a Tail Like This? (Page & Jenkins)
- ✓ When Sophie Gets Angry – Really, Really Angry (Bang)
- ✓ Where Is Baby’s Belly Button? (Katz)
- ✓ Where The Wild Things Are (Sendak)
- ✓ Who Is the Beast? (Baker)
- ✓ Whoever You Are (Fox)
- ✓ The Wheels on the Bus: An Adaptation of the Traditional Song (Kovalski)

**The list above was developed, in part, from the following resources:**

American Library Association. *Caldecott Medal winners and Honor books*. Available online at: <http://www.ala.org/ala/alsc/awardsscholarships/literaryawds/caldecottmedal/caldecotthonors/caldcottmedal.htm>

Children’s Book Council. *Reading lists: Books to grow on*. Available online at: <http://www.cbc-books.org/readinglists/bookstogrow.html>

Jalongo, M. R. (2004). *Young children and picture books*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children. Pages 55, 78-79.

Schickedanz, J. A. (1999). *Much more than the ABCs: The early stages of reading and writing*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children. Pages 38-39, 68-69, 77-78.

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