

Especially for practitioners working with infants!

First Picture Books

Print Awareness and Reading

When infants are able to sit on an adult’s lap and reach for things, it is probably a good time to introduce books. This guide includes ideas you can use to introduce books to infants and young children and to help parents make the most of their book-sharing experiences.

What is the practice?

Infants become interested in books when adults enthusiastically help them learn to enjoy looking at pictures of people, objects, and other things that they see every day. Imagine a child looking at things that are familiar, fun, and interesting, and you will have a good idea why book reading can become so enjoyable.

What does the practice look like?

A baby sitting on an adult’s lap is looking at a book with colorful pictures of different animals. The baby reaches and pats a picture of a baby animal. The adult says in a gleeful way, “Yes, you see the kitty!” The baby looks at another page. Again, the baby reaches and touches the picture, and the adult describes what the baby sees. The back-and-forth play between the infant and the adult gets the baby more and more excited.



How do you do the practice?

There are many different ways to introduce books to a baby. Try these simple steps to help children learn the joys of books.

- Start by picking out the things at which the child enjoys looking. This can be pictures of baby faces, photographs of familiar people, animal board books, books of familiar objects, or anything the child seems to like.
- There are many ways to introduce books to the child. Board books and other commercially available books can be especially engaging. Public libraries often have books for infants that can be borrowed. Try making a book. Small photo albums are especially good for showing an infant pictures of familiar people, objects, and activities. Search the Web using **how to make books for babies**, and you will find many helpful ideas.
- It is best to introduce a book to the baby when she is alert and attentive. Nestle the child in your lap or prop her against your arm in a snuggling position. If the child does not like to be held, use an infant seat or prop her in a sitting position in the corner of a chair using pillows.
- Show the child the book and point at the picture on a page while naming the picture. Follow the child’s lead. Describe in short sentences what she is looking at or touching. “Book reading” episodes should be like a game of give and take. You do something (e.g., turn the page), the child does something (e.g., smiles and gets excited), and you keep the game going (e.g., “the baby is looking at you!”). The more the child looks, touches, and otherwise is enjoying the activity, the better.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Is the child sitting longer and longer during the reading episodes?
- Does the child reach, pat, or point at the pictures?
- Does the child recognize things she has seen before by smiling and getting excited?

Take a look at more fun with picture books

Fascination

Jody is nestled in his caregiver Hilde's lap as she shows him a book of baby faces. She turns each page while waiting for 8-month-old Jody to show some sign that he notices the pictures at which he is looking. Each time Jody moves and seems excited, Hilde points to and describes the pictures in the book. The more they look at the book, the more Jody becomes fascinated with the adult-child activity.



Noise-Maker Books

William, who is 7 months old, loves to sit in his highchair and bang things to make noise. His mother encourages him by drumming her fingers on the highchair tray. His home visitor noticed this interest, so she found a book for William that has a different kind of noisemaker on each page. She opens a page and pats the noisemaker. William squeals happily in surprise. It is not long before he reaches and tries to make the sounds himself. His mother helps him while describing the objects William sees and the noises that he makes. William "asks" for the book sometimes by pounding excitedly on surfaces and making lots of his own noise when he sees it.

Animal Book Delight

Sean, age 16 months, loves interacting with his parents but has difficulty holding his head up for even short periods of time. His mom and dad, who are avid readers, are eager to help Sean enjoy books. They often lie down with Sean, propping his head in the crook of their arms so that head control is not a problem. Sean's parents know he really likes pictures of animals. From the very first time he was shown an animal picture book, Sean has shown excitement. He greets every new page and every word and animal sound his parents utter with interest and delight as they look at the colorful pictures together.

