

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.



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First Word Books

Print Awareness and Reading

A picture may be worth a thousand words, but understanding how one picture and one word go together is how reading begins. This practice guide includes ideas for how to use word books with infants and their parents to help young children get on a path to reading.



What is the practice?

Picture books with a single word for each picture introduce an infant to printed text. Showing a child pictures of fun and interesting things while naming and talking about the pictures is how book reading becomes an enjoyable and anticipated activity. This kind of book reading is how infants begin to understand that sounds and words correspond to the things they see and hear.

What does the practice look like?

Baby's first word books include pictures of familiar and interesting people, things, and objects. They have only one picture and one word on each page. Read the words to the child while pointing at the picture and printed text. This will encourage him to point to or touch the picture. Any time the child points or touches the picture or word before being asked to, say, "Yes, that is a (name of the picture)."

How do you do the practice?

The following are some ideas that you can use to build the child's interest in word books.

- The best books are ones that include pictures of things that are both familiar to the child and that catch his interest. Faces, toys, and other objects that the child regularly sees generally work best. The books should have one picture and one word on each page.
- You can make a word book out of a small photo album by inserting pictures and writing the names of the people or objects on the pictures. The best photo albums are ones that have plastic sleeves for holding photographs.
- Find any comfortable position where the book can be held directly in front of the child. Show the child one of the pages and name the picture while pointing to the printed word. Ask questions like, "Do you see the ___?" Any time the child reaches, touches, or points to the picture or printed word, repeat the word. As the child becomes more involved in this kind of book reading, add more information in response to the child's interest in the pictures (e.g., "Yes, the kitty is smiling at you").
- You do not need to go through the entire book. It is best to stop before the child loses interest.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does the child more frequently touch or point to the pictures in a book?
- Does the child sometimes make sounds or say part of the words after hearing them?
- Does the child want you to go through the book over again after finishing?

Take a look at more first word books

All About Me!

Nine-month-old Ethan loves to look at himself in a mirror. His teacher in child care uses this interest to make a word book of pictures of Ethan. The book includes eight pictures of Ethan with each picture having one word describing his expressions (happy, sad, joyful, crying, etc.). With Ethan nestled in his teacher's arms, she shows him one of his pictures, which gets him excited. She points to the picture while saying "Yes, that is Ethan. You are a happy baby." Ethan becomes engrossed in looking at the pictures and having his teacher talk about him.



Sharing Reading

Anytime 11-month-old Antonio sees an animal, he gets excited. His home visitor, Esperanza, suggests that Antonio's mom use books about animals to introduce him to shared reading. She seats him comfortably in her lap and shows him the book of familiar animals (cats, dogs, birds, etc.). Esperanza holds the book out in front of Antonio, who reaches and touches one of the pages. Esperanza says, "Do you see the cat? You do!" She shows Antonio each page one at a time. She follows his lead by saying the name of each animal he touches and describing what the animal is doing. When Esperanza and Antonio's mom notice he is losing interest, they tell him that all the animals are going to sleep and put the book away.

Touch-Pad Toys 'Book'

Nico is 10 months old. His early interventionist, Sally, has found a special way to introduce him to word books that really keeps Nico's attention and encourages him to interact with books. With the help of his mom, Sally has put together a collection of digital photos of Nico's favorite toys on a computer. She has inserted the words for each toy on the photos. She has even added speech to the photos, which is activated when Nico pushes a touch-sensitive pad. Nico's mother holds him on her lap in front of the computer and shows Nico how to make each of the pictures "talk." The combination of pictures, words, and speech keeps Nico's attention for what seems like a very long time. Mom helps him "turn the pages" by putting his hand on the touch pad.



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Repeated Storytelling

Print Awareness and Reading

Infants delight in hearing the same story over and over. Hearing the same story again and again helps infants become familiar with words, phrases, and sayings.

What is the practice?

Storytelling is simply a way of making talking and interacting a fun, interesting, and enjoyable experience for a child. Infants “say” to their caregivers, “tell me more,” by getting excited when they hear the same story again and again. Phrases such as “once upon a time” become cues that let the child know she is about to hear a story. The more the child hears the familiar sounds of a story she likes, the more she will vocalize and use gestures to get you to tell the story again.



What does the practice look like?

Storytelling with infants involves short stories or phrases that have highly repetitive elements. They can be made-up stories, like telling the child about coming home from the hospital, or you can use a book to read a story to the child. The best storytelling includes exaggerated facial and body movements and highly expressive sounds and words that bring the story to life! Ham it up. The child will love it.

How do you do the practice?

Here are some ideas for introducing stories to the child:

- Pick a story that is about something familiar and interesting to the child, like a favorite toy, pet, or family member.
- Keep the story simple, short, and repetitive. A child's first stories should be only about three or four sentences so the sounds become more and more familiar.
- Make the child the star of the story! Make up stories about the child, and when using a book to tell a story, pretend the story is about her.
- Use funny gestures, silly voices, and exaggerated facial expressions when telling the story. Make the story entertaining.
- Look for signs that the child wants you to tell her the story again. Any time she seems to want to hear the story again, ask: “Do you want me to tell you the story again?” Repeat the story as many times as she seems interested in hearing it.
- Encourage the child to become part of the storytelling. Ask simple questions and answer them for the child (e.g., “Did you like the story about [child’s name]? Yes, you did! You are a superstar!”).
- The child does not need to understand the story to be part of the storytelling. The idea is to use storytelling to make a conversational activity fun, and for the child to hear the same words and phrases over and over.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does the child get excited when you are about to tell a story?
- Is the child especially attentive to the words and your movements?
- Does she smile and vocalize as part of hearing the story?

Take a look at more repeated storytelling

I Love This Story!

Ananda is six months old. When Ananda's dad drops her off at child care every morning, her caregiver, Holly, sits with her in a cuddling position where Ananda is able to see Holly's face. This has become a favorite position for Ananda to listen to her special story. Holly starts by asking in an exaggerated tone, "How is my big girl doing today?" She continues in a lively tone of voice, "Ananda is so big and so, so strong. Ananda is also soooo, soooo, cute!" Holly laughs and asks, "You like your story, don't you?" Then she repeats the story in a sing-song manner with exaggerated facial expressions, "Ananda is so-big, so-strong, and soooo cute!" Ananda "hangs on" every word by listening, smiling, vocalizing, and moving about, showing how much she likes her story.



My Own Story

Lauren's home visitor, Talia, has explained the importance of storytelling to Lauren's parents, even though Lauren is too young to really understand the words yet. Lauren's father has made up a story about how much he and Lauren's mom wanted a little girl. "Once upon a time Mommy and Daddy decided to have a baby." (Lauren looks intently.) "They so hoped it would be a little girl. And guess what?" (Waiting for Lauren to respond) "We got our little Lauren! You are just what we wanted. We are soooo, soooo very lucky (in a lively tone)." Dad pauses between sentences in the storytelling, as Talia recommended, so that Lauren can

say or do something like vocalize or smile. Whenever she does, Dad adds, "You like your story, don't you?" Lauren has become more and more involved in the story the more she hears it.

"What Did He Hear?"

Jamie was diagnosed with a visual impairment when she was just about 4 months old. She has learned to listen intently to sounds as a way of knowing what is going on around her. Jamie's early interventionist helped her mother use Jamie's keen listening skills to make her part of a storytelling game they play together. Mom holds Jamie on her lap and starts the story by saying, "Once upon a time, Jamie went for a ride with her mommy." (Mom holds her daughter on her legs and moves her about.) "Jamie listens to everything around her. What did she hear? A dog?" (Mom says "woof.") "A cat?" (Mom says "meow.") "A cow?" (Mom asks "What does the cow say?"). The story continues while Jamie coos and wiggles in response to her mom's questions.



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Touch-and-Feel Books

Print Awareness and Reading

Infants love to reach and grab just about anything within reach! Touch-and-feel books can be a fun way of combining reaching and touching with book reading.

What is the practice?

This practice uses both store-bought and homemade touch-and-feel books to involve an infant in looking at, touching, and exploring books. All the while, a parent or caregiver describes what the child is doing, or tells the child a story as she plays with a book.

What does the practice look like?

An infant who loves to reach, grab, and touch everything and anything in sight is shown a touch-and-feel book. The infant is seated on her mother's lap facing away from her with the book held out in front of the child. Not surprisingly, the girl immediately reaches for and grabs the book. Mom opens the book, and to her daughter's surprise, she sees the fluffy tail of a rabbit! As the child runs her hand over the tail, her mother describes what she is doing ("The bunny tail is soft"). Page after page, the little girl gets more and more excited.



How do you do the practice?

The best touch-and-feel books are ones that include things that the child likes and enjoys. These can be store-bought or homemade books. Search the Web using **homemade touch-and-feel books** for ideas for making a special book for a particular child.

- Start by thinking about the things the child especially likes to see and touch. The more interesting the book pages are to the child, the better.
- Look for books that include as many of those favorite things as you can find. Try making a "My Special Touch Book."
- Find any position that is comfortable to the child to show her the book. Talk about and describe what she is seeing and doing.
- Repeat any movements or sounds she makes. This will encourage her to want to continue to look at the book.
- Make the book reading as fun and enjoyable as you can.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does the child reach for and grab the book?
- Does she get excited when she sees things that are familiar to her?
- Does the child vocalize more and "talk to" what she is seeing?

Take a look at more touch-and-feel books

Terrific Textures

Seven-month-old Veronica often lies in her crib after waking up from a nap and rubs and touches whatever is in her crib (stuffed animal, crib rails, mobile). She seems to especially like the feel of different kinds of materials. Based on this interest, Veronica's mom and her home visitor have found some touch-and-feel books for her that include different animals and textures. They know Veronica especially likes looking at pictures of animals, so they decide to see what she will do with the touch-and-feel book. Veronica is beside herself! Almost immediately she is grabbing, touching, feeling, and vocalizing at the animals as her mother talks about and describes what Veronica is doing.



My Touchy-Feely Book

Gavin's caregiver, Katie, knows how much he loves to touch and feel different things. She also knows that 12-month-old Gavin especially likes things that move when he touches or pushes them. Katie gathers different things that Gavin likes to touch to make Gavin's Touchy-Feely Book. The book has 10 pages with a picture of one of his favorite things on the left side and the fabric or material that "feels like" that favorite thing on the right side. For instance, one page has a picture of a drum and a small piece of canvas to feel. Katie describes what Gavin is seeing and makes up sounds to go with each of the objects. Gavin and the other children in Katie's class love the new book and make different sounds as they play with it.



Cheek to Cheek

Bayley's physical difficulties make it hard for him to reach for things in front of him. With the help of his early interventionist, his mother has found a way to read to Bayley using touch-and-feel books that her 8-month-old son especially likes. Instead of Bayley reaching for and touching the pages of the book, his mom describes what he is seeing and then rubs his nose or cheek with the book page. Bayley's early interventionist helps by bringing different fabrics and textures with which he can play during their visits. Sometimes his mom also uses stuffed animals or other materials to show and talk about how different textures feel.



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ABC Books for Beginners

Print Awareness and Reading

Learning the alphabet starts long before a child is able to say the ABCs. ABC books are one way of turning story time into fun times filled with sounds, words, and letters.

What is the practice?

This practice uses store-bought or homemade ABC books to familiarize infants with the alphabet. It involves them in learning to enjoy books and storytelling. You can use these techniques or introduce them to parents in order to maximize young children's ABC-book-sharing experiences.

What does the practice look like?

You can use ABC books to show a child pictures of familiar or interesting objects and the first letters of words as you read or tell the child a story. You can recite an ABC rhyme, or use a book as part of a "made-up" story. ABC books will introduce the child to letters as part of having a story read or told to him. The more the child hears the sounds of words and letters of the alphabet, the more he will learn to notice the differences in sounds.

How do you do the practice?

There is not a right or wrong way to use ABC books with a child. The idea is to use the books to tell a story through illustrations of familiar things that include letters of the alphabet.

- Find or make ABC books that include things that are familiar and interesting to the child. Start with things he likes and enjoys.
- Read to the child when he is alert and interested in sitting on your lap or next to you.
- Show the book to the child and read or talk about what is on each page. Read in an enthusiastic and entertaining manner.
- Introduce descriptions of the ABCs into the storytelling. There is no need to try to go through the entire book at one time. Start with a few pages and add one or two pages each time you and the child read the book.
- Encourage the child to be part of the storytelling by having him touch, hold, bang, and yes, taste the book!



How do you know the practice worked?

- Does the child point to or touch pictures that are familiar to him?
- Does the child make sounds or try to repeat things you do or say?
- Does the child hand you books to read to him?

Take a look at more first ABC books

A Book of My Own

Nicholas' mother knows how important it is to read to her son from an early age. Her home visitor suggested making a book just for him. Together at each visit they have been taking and collecting pictures of Nicholas' favorite toys, people, animals, and other things. His mom chooses five of the pictures for Nicholas' first ABC book. She writes the first letter of each person or object on the picture. Next mom puts them in a small photo album to make his book. She introduces the book to her son by saying

"Mommy has a special treat for Nicholas. His very own ABC book." They find a comfortable place with Nicholas sitting between her legs while she holds the book in front of him. Mom reads the book's title while pointing to it: "Nicholas' ABC Book." "Let's read your book!" Mom says to Nicholas. She opens to the first page, which has a picture of Nicholas' big sister. He reaches for and pats the picture, while Mom says, "You see Abby! Abby starts with an A." They continue looking at the ABC book, pointing, talking, and getting excited.



What's Next?

Jada's mother is sitting in a chair with 8-month-old Jada seated in her lap. They begin to read what has become a favorite book. The story is about ABCs racing up a coconut tree while playing a game of tag. "A tells B..." Mom reads, and asks Jada, "What's next?" Mom recites the book's rhyming chant, pausing between verses to ask her daughter to "guess what happens next." This excites Jada, especially when she hears the names of the letters she remembers. The story ends with Jada babbling along as her mom reads, "Chicka, chicka, boom, boom, they all fall down!"

Animal ABC Fun

Samantha is 14 months old. She has both a physical disability and some visual difficulties. Samantha enjoys hearing her teacher, Adele, sing ABC songs. Adele knows that some of Samantha's favorite things are animals. She especially likes bears, dogs, and other animals that make "scary sounds." As part of singing ABC songs to the children in her classroom, Adele uses a large-print book about animals. Each picture has the first letter of each animal's name. Adele does not expect the children to learn the letters. She just wants them to have lots of fun with the names and first letters of the animal names. Samantha gets excited and makes lots of sounds whenever her teacher shows her the pictures of her favorites.

