

Especially for practitioners working with toddlers!

Picture Book Fun

Storytelling and Listening

Looking at picture books with the toddlers in your care familiarizes them with books and book-reading behavior. Books that have only pictures or pictures with very few words allow children to feel confident learning to “read.” These books also introduce toddlers to print concepts.

What is the practice?

Making the connection between pictures in a book and the story helps toddlers develop a love for books and storytelling. Sharing picture books with toddlers builds their confidence with books. It teaches important print concepts such as reading from left to right and top to bottom.

What does the practice look like?

Looking at picture books can be a one-to-one activity or a group activity. In the classroom, supply your children with lots of picture books in all the centers. Provide books that cover a wide range of topics and interests. As a home visitor, you can use picture books to introduce children to storytelling and to elicit language. Actively engage the children in the reading activity. Ask questions about what is happening in the pictures and encourage them to tell a story.



How do you do the practice?

There are many ways to actively involve toddlers in looking at picture books.

- In a classroom, place picture books in easy-to-reach spots and in different centers, giving toddlers easy access to the materials. Picture books about houses or building can go in the blocks center. Put animal or bug books in the science center.
- Choose books that are easy for toddlers to handle, such as board books or oversized formats. Make sure they have large, colorful pictures.
- When looking at these books one-on-one or in small groups, use looking at the book as a context for conversation. Ask the toddlers what they see in the pictures, what is going on, and what might happen next. Picture books often have pictures that can tell a story in a number of ways. They are a good way to encourage your toddlers to use their imaginations.
- By talking about what you are doing as you look at picture books together, you help toddlers become more familiar with book rules. They learn how to hold a book, turn pages one by one, and that we read from left to right. With repeated readings, they also may start using “story conventions” in their storytelling—beginning with “Once upon a time...” or ending with “The end.”
- Make a homemade book with the toddlers in your class. Take a picture of each of the toddlers in your room and create a book. Toddlers love to look at pictures of themselves.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Are the children in your care asking you to reread a certain picture book?
- Have you found your toddlers “reading” picture books to each other?
- Do your toddlers seem to understand how a book is read, and echo some story conventions?

Take a look at more picture books and toddlers

Toddler Reference Library

In Casey's classroom, the toddlers have access to books in every learning center. Many of them are picture books, which the children especially enjoy because of the lively photographs or illustrations. In the manipulatives center, two boys consult a book featuring photographs of different styles of houses while building with Legos. In the blocks center there are books about cars and trucks. A group of children compares the pictures in a book as they play with their favorite toy models. In the art center, one child pages through an animal picture book before making an orange spider with play dough. The picture books are part of their daily routines. They give the children a chance to use books in both practical and enjoyable ways.



First Look at a New Book

Twenty-six-month-old Della loves playing with all the toys her home visitor, Breanne, brings on her visits. She especially enjoys the new books Breanne brings weekly. Della shows them to her mom immediately. "What've you got?" her mom asks, sitting down next to Della. "Breanne brought you a picture book. Let's see what's in it." They look at the pictures together, talking about what they see. Della's mom knows not to worry about reading the words yet. Instead, they focus on whatever captures Della's interest. She and Breanne ask Della questions as they look: What do you see? What's this little boy doing? Where do you think he's going? The three of them tell a story of their own using the pictures.

Making Books of Our Own

In Lesley's inclusive toddler classroom, she tries hard to make books accessible and enjoyable to all her children. One project her toddlers love is making their own books. She gives them magazines out of which to tear or cut pictures. Some children use adapted scissors. Lesley helps them glue their favorite pictures to sturdy construction paper. When the glue dries, she fastens their sheets together. She encourages the children to "read" their books. They read them back to her and to each other, using words or signs or a combination. Sometimes Lesley makes their books more "thematic," by providing only food magazines or only toy catalogs. Some of the children have already begun to "tell stories" with their handmade picture books. Others prefer naming their favorite objects on a page. Either way, they take pride in making their own books that they can "read."

