

Tip Sheets

Infants and Toddlers: Early Language and Literacy



The development of speech and language skills opens up a whole new world of learning for infants and toddlers. There is a link between the learning of speech and language skills and learning to read and write. Each is a process of

continuous development that begins during those first years of life. These skills also develop most effectively through positive interactions with caregivers and materials that promote literacy. The development of literacy skills includes opportunities to explore:

- Books
- Singing
- Learning rhymes and finger-plays
- Listening to stories
- Scribbling

Formal instruction of these skills during the early years is not developmentally appropriate. Rather these skills should be promoted through:

- Play
- Meaningful and enjoyable activities
- Responsive relationships with caregivers

For example, as toddlers develop the ability to participate in pretend play, they develop the ability to understand symbols—that one object can be used to represent another (i.e. a block can be a car)—which is necessary to understand that a word can stand for a thing or an idea. The ability to understand symbols is also important in the development of skills in math, logic, and creativity.

The Importance of Reading Aloud

Reading aloud to infants and toddlers and engaging them in books by labeling pictures, commenting on the pictures and text, and asking questions provides positive nurturing experiences that promote the understanding of oral language.

By being read aloud on a regular basis, in the context of nurturing and supportive relationships, infants and toddlers are exposed to:

- Increased vocabulary
- Rhythms and patterns of speech
- Opportunities to develop creative and imaginative thinking.

The American Academy of Pediatrics promotes reading aloud to infants/toddlers as a means to:

- Develop positive and supportive relationships
- Encourage language skill development
- Prepare them to become ready to read

Reading aloud to young children has also been shown to enhance the development of executive function skills such as attention and self-regulation.

Additional Resources

Get Ready to Read

<http://www.getreadytoread.org/early-learning-childhood-basics/early-literacy>

Reading Rockets (Early Literacy)

<http://www.readingrockets.org>

Talking is Teaching

<http://talkingisteaching.org>

For more information, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

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