

Playing with...BOOKS!

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There are endless articles telling parents about the importance of reading to little ones, but what about reading to babies and toddlers who don't seem interested? What do you do with all those wonderful picture books that don't really have a story to read? How can you use a book to help a child learn to talk when they are supposed to listen?



Well, let's start with this: **Books are toys.**

Books for babies are just like anything else...something to explore. The text on the page is not as important as following your baby's lead and talking about HER interests. This means you don't need to name every picture on the page. You can even skip pages. Let her turn the pages. Go forward or backward in the book. "Sing" the book to increase attention. Try "reading" with no words at all and just make meaningful vehicle, animal, or excited noises – as appropriate.

When your toddler prefers to move rather than sit for a story, choose books that you can touch/feel, lift a flap, stick your hands through a cut out, or look at your own reflection. The idea is we want toddlers to be interested in books, pages, pictures, etc. Sitting for a story may not yet be their interest. When you play with books, make sure you sit across from your toddler so that you can see each other. Not only does that give your toddler a better opportunity to watch your face and mouth as you name the pictures, but you'll be better able to talk about his interests by watching his eyes. Of course, this does not necessarily mean you'll both be seated. You may need to start by holding the book up and shining a flashlight on a page just to get his attention. If he leaves the book quickly then make sure you "peek" at the next page with an excited "woowww" to see if that will spark his interest to come back.

If your toddler enjoys books but just doesn't name many of the pictures, try sounds. Pretend to eat the food "yum", make the vehicle and animal noises, blow kisses to the babies "mmmmwah", say "hi" to the people, and "bye bye" to the book when it's finished. Singing books is fun too and can help make those picture books more predictable. Pick any familiar tune and just name each picture to that melody.

Once your toddler is interested in books and has some favorites, leave out the rhyming words for him to fill-in. Purposefully skip a page to see if he'll correct you. Name objects incorrectly. These are all great ways to make books more interactive and playful.

*For the FULL article and specific book list, go to www.letsplaythespeechandlanguage.com.

