READ

Reading Together: The Early Years

Learning to read begins with learning to talk, and learning to talk began even before your baby was born! As a parent, you play an essential role in helping your child learn to communicate, and that includes reading later on.

Why Read to Your Baby
When you read aloud to your baby, he hears the sounds of speech. He'll soon be able to produce these sounds himself, but first he must hear them from his caregivers. Talk to your child often throughout the day. Researchers say the more words parents use, the more words their child will know. As your child grows, he will learn to understand words by hearing them connected to objects in his environment or pictures in his books. The next step is saying the words he understands. Talking to your baby and reading out loud will increase his vocabulary, teach him word sounds and prepare him to read the words he already knows.

Tips for Daily Reading
Reading experts say a child must be exposed to more than a thousand experiences of hearing printed words read aloud before he's ready to learn to read. There are many ways you can help your baby's emerging literacy in the early years. Here are a few.

• Give infants and toddlers sturdy books to look at, touch and hold. Your baby will learn how to handle books long before he learns to read.

• Read to your baby for 5 to 10 minutes several times a day. By keeping reading times short, your baby won't get tired.
• Read when your baby is alert and contented so he can focus on the sound of your voice.
• Hold your baby close during reading. He will associate reading time with the comfort and pleasure of being held.
• Share printed materials such as menus or mail with your older toddler. He is beginning to realize that words are all around him.
• Show enthusiasm while reading. Use facial expressions and hand movements. Make sounds or use different voices for the characters. With young babies, use parentese, a tone of voice that's higher in pitch and slower. It's the way adults instinctively talk to babies and it helps them listen.
• Don't worry if you have trouble reading. Your baby will like the sound of your voice talking about the pictures in the book.
• Read books again and again. Children like to have the books repeated — and repetition helps them learn new words.
• Be a reader yourself. Children need to see adults model that reading is important and a source of pleasure. Babies should hear males and females read aloud.

Most of all, relax and enjoy reading time with your baby. You're giving him an early start on the knowledge path!