



Singing, Talking, and Sharing Books With Your Child

Aside from being an enjoyable activity for both you and your baby, singing helps them learn! It's a great way for them to learn about their language and culture - all cultures everywhere make music and have songs. They learn about rhythms and rhymes, very important for language *and* math skills. Through songs they learn new words. Singing is fun! Singing can be a way to help them with transitions so they know what comes next. And singing is something everyone knows how to do, so be sure and sing with your infant, toddler, preschooler, and older child.

You might think it's silly to talk with a baby but research shows there are many benefits that last throughout life. Did you know that professional parents talk more to their kids than parents who don't have professional training and degrees? This results in a **30 million word gap** by age three. That means that children of professional parents have heard 30 million more words by age three. And not just from parents talking *at* their kids, but from parents talking *with* their kids, having *conversations*. So begin talking to your baby in infancy to give them this learning advantage. You can begin by showing and naming things that s/he sees or points to. Be sure and use big gestures, too. Describe what you and your baby are doing. Talk about feelings. When you say a word or make a sound, give your baby a chance to respond with a coo or other sound. This is the back-and-forth beginning of conversation.

As your baby gets older match your conversations to his or her new abilities. Use and model longer sentences and use new words. Begin to introduce questions that get at reasons ("Why do we need a coat to go outside today?"). Be sure and do more than just name things for your child. Describe, contrast, and compare. Help them learn words for math and science: bigger, shorter, taller, more, less, hot, cold. Even with babies we can use number and size words: "One-two, peek-a-boo," "How big? *SO BIG!*" "One-two, buckle my shoe." Almost all daily activities involve number and science concepts. Matching socks and shoes to feet is called one-to-one correspondence. Sorting laundry by size, shape of the clothing item, color, and texture can be done with older toddlers to teach them about categories, matching, size, etc. Cooking is a great way to learn many concepts - and children love to do simple cooking activities. The mess is worth it! Talking this way with your child will build a strong foundation for kindergarten and school success.

Sharing books with babies could be a whole website in itself. If you Google this phrase you will get over 17 million hits. In addition to the few suggestions we have for you we want to encourage you to talk to the Children's Librarian in your community - she will have some great ideas about how to share books with babies and young children. For babies use cloth, textured, and heavy board books with simple pictures of faces, kids, and everyday items. Let them hold

(even upside-down), mouthe, open and close, pass back-and-forth, and drop books. Don't insist that they hold them the "right" way, or that they go from beginning to end, or that they follow along as you "read" the story. Exploring and sharing books should be fun.

As your baby develops, the way you share books with them should match their new skills. You can point to pictures and the real objects represented by the pictures. You can ask your toddler to touch a picture of a word (but be sure and do this playfully and accept all "answers" as OK). Babies, toddlers, and preschoolers like to hear the same stories over and over, so be prepared for this. Let them choose the books they want to share with you - have several choices available. You can pause and let them fill in the blank - they'll know the story well enough to do this pretty early. Begin to wonder out loud about the story "I wonder how Corduroy felt when the little girl want to buy him," and "I wonder why the little bunny says goodnight to the things in his room."

Remember, if you're enjoying sharing a book with your child s/he is probably enjoying it, too. If you are getting bored, restless, or demanding, s/he will sense this, so stop until you can be in the right frame of mind for it to be pleasurable for both of you.