



Using Books to Develop Language

My child is only 3 months old, will they really understand books at this age?

The first thing young children tend to do with books is chew on them! However, by bringing out and exposing babies to books you are starting them on that journey of learning about books and what they can offer. Make sure the books you have are fun, brightly coloured or, for very young babies, black and white, with clear pictures that might grab their attention. Just exploring books is great at this young age. You can label the pictures, make the animal sounds, make up little stories or sing. The important thing is that your young baby is hearing language and tuning in to your voice, whilst exploring something new.

We've got hundreds of books in our house but my child keeps going back to the same books. Will this limit his vocabulary development?

There is some research which shows that children repeatedly exposed to the same books will learn and retain new vocabulary better than those exposed to a wide range of different books. Of course that can be hard for parents who have to read the same books over and over again. Try rotating the books available to your child but maintaining some of those old favourites!

My child is 2 years old. What kind of books should I be reading to him?

Choosing the right book for your child can be very important if you are going to grab their attention. Thinking about their interests is a good start but also think about where they are with their language development. You can check out the ages and stages of language development [here](#). Children who have a good grasp of language may enjoy longer books. However, if they are still learning to say new words sometimes simpler books allow more opportunity to repeat and emphasise new words for them to copy.

There is no rule about which books are appropriate for which age but as a rough guide:

0-18 months

At this age children will love cardboard books and plastic books after all there is a good chance they will be chewed and thrown about. Touch and feel books are great as well as lift-the-flaps and pop-up books.

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Between 12 and 18 months

Children may become interested in little stories, rhymes and 'look and say' books which can help to develop early vocabulary.

Examples: *Dear Zoo* by Rod Campbell; Usborne, *That's not my....* series by Fiona Watt and *Look and Say* books also by Usborne; *Just like Daddy* by Cecilia Johanson; *Guess Who* by Jeannette Rowe.

18 months to 2 1/2 years

At this age books can really become appealing to some children. Lift-the-flap books are still a great way of engaging children at this age and provide opportunities for you to name the things your child sees and for them to start trying out new words and experimenting with the words they know. Approaching two years old, they may start to enjoy short stories. There may still be lots of language that your child will not understand which means books do not always have to be read exactly as they are written. Children of this age may still prefer to flick through to the bits they know and like which is perfectly fine. Books with repetitive words, phrases and/or sentences are great at this age as children's language really starts to develop.

Examples: *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle; *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* and *Snore* by Michael Rosen; *Ketchup on your Cornflakes* by Nick Sharratt; *Tales from Acorn Wood* by Julia Donaldson, for example 'Fox's Socks' and 'Rabbit's Nap'; *Owl Babies* by Martin Waddell

From 2 1/2 years

At this age children may start to enjoy longer stories as their understanding of language begins to develop. But remember your child may still prefer shorter, higher interest stories and that is ok! Also, for some children their understanding of language is further ahead of what they can say. They can still benefit from sharing shorter repetitive stories that allow them to join in only saying a few words.

Examples: *Ladybird First Favourite Tales*, for example 'Three Little Pigs'; Julia Donaldson books such as *Monkey Puzzle* and *Squash and a Squeeze*; *Emily Brown Series* by Cressida Cowell and *Percy the Park Keeper Series* by Nick Butterworth

Don't forget family photo albums or photo books can be a great way of introducing the idea of books to children of all ages. Photo's can often be a great source of enjoyment, and an opportunity to use lots of language to name, talk about what was happening and so forth.

My toddler is just not interested in books. How can I encourage him to like books?

For some children, developing an interest in books can be more challenging! It's great if you can make listening to stories part of a bedtime routine. Think about if you are you reading books that interest them? Are the books too complicated or too simple?

Sometimes children enjoy making story dens or corners with lots of cushions and blankets

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where they can feel cozy when listening and 'reading' with a parent. Some children's books are accompanied by DVDs/CDs which can be used alongside books to bring them to life. It's always great if you can sit and watch the DVD with your child so you can model the language from the story for them. You could also try story props and puppets.

How can I use books to help develop my child's language?

There are lots of ways that books can be used to develop children's talking and understanding as well as developing speech sounds. Try some of the following strategies:

- Use 'fun' words like 'wheeee' and 'boom' to help bring the story to life. Make animal noises like 'baa' and 'moo'.
- Use props or real objects to accompany a story to make the pictures more real to the child
- Sometimes it's ok to sit back and watch how your child reacts to a book. Which bit interests them? Are they trying to say some words?
- Don't rush reading; sometimes children may want to spend time talking or looking at one particular page
- Try missing out the end of a sentence and pausing when the sentence is familiar and/or repetitive e.g. that's not my...(lion) or 'just like...(daddy). Your child may then take the opportunity to fill in the word.
- Try to avoid too many testing questions such as 'what's that', 'where's the dog' and so on. These can be useful sometimes but children benefit more from hearing you say the words and using strategies like pausing to see if they copy e.g. 'I can see a dog, you can see a (pause)...'

Useful Websites:

[The Literacy Trust](#)

[Get the Story Straight: Contextual Repetition Promotes Word Learning from Storybooks](#)

[Read On. Get On](#) - a national campaign to get all children reading well.

[Jake and Tizzy Books](#)

Explore the world of Jake and Tizzy in a series of story books produced by I CAN, the children's communication charity. The books are based on everyday familiar situations and routines so that young children can relate them to their own experiences. Jake & Tizzy books are a fun way to support language development at pre-school age, helping children to develop skills ready to start primary school.

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