

Especially for parents of young children! 

Baby's First Word Books

Stories and Listening

A picture may be “worth a thousand words,” but seeing how one picture and one word go together is how reading begins. This practice guide includes ideas about how to use word books to help your baby start on a path to reading.



What is the practice?

Picture books that pair each picture with a single word introduce an infant to printed text. Showing your baby pictures of fun and interesting things while naming and talking about the pictures makes book reading an enjoyable part of your routine. This kind of reading helps infants begin to understand that letters and words mean the same things they see and hear.

What does the practice look like?

A baby's first word book has pictures of familiar and interesting people, places, and things. First word books should have only one picture and one word per page. Read the words to your child while pointing at the picture and printed text. This will encourage him to point to or touch the picture. Any time your child points or touches the picture or word before being asked, say, “Yes, that is a (name of the picture).”

How do you do the practice?

The following are some ideas you can use to build your child's interest in word books.

- The best first word books are ones with pictures of things that are both familiar and interesting to your child. Faces, toys, and other objects that your child regularly sees are best. Choose books that have one picture and one word on each page.
- You can make your own word books using a small photo album. Insert pictures and write the names of the people or objects under the pictures. Albums with plastic sleeves work well.
- Settle into a comfortable position where you can hold the book directly in front of your child. Show one of the pages and name the picture while pointing to the printed word. Ask questions like “Do you see the ___?” Any time your child reaches, touches, or points to the picture or printed word, repeat the word. As your child becomes more involved in this kind of book reading, add additional information in response to your child's interest in the pictures (for example, “Yes, the kitty is smiling at you!”).
- You do not need to go through the entire book. It is best to stop before your child loses interest.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your child touch or look at the pictures in a book more often?
- Does your child sometimes babble or try to say the words after hearing them?
- Does your child want you to go through the book more than once?

Take a look at more first word books for babies

Words About Me!

Five-month-old Ethan loves to look at himself in mirrors. Noticing this interest, his mom makes a word book with pictures of Ethan. The book includes eight pictures of Ethan, with each picture having one word describing his expression—happy, sad, joyful, crying, and more. Ethan's mother shows him the first page, which really excites him. She points to the picture while saying, "Yes, that's Ethan. You are a happy baby! Happy!" Ethan delights in looking at the pictures and having his mother talk about him.



Reach and Touch

Antonio, age 11 months, is on his mother's lap. Mom shows him a book of familiar animals—cats, dogs, birds, etc. As he looks at each animal, Antonio babbles and giggles. His mom holds the book out in front of Antonio who reaches and touches one of the pages. Mom says, "Do you see the cat? You do!" She shows him each of the pages one at a time and follows his lead by saying the name of the animal he touches and describing what the animal is doing. When Mom notices that her son is losing interest, she tells Antonio that all the animals are going to sleep and puts the book away. They enjoy the book together often.

Computer Word Book

Nico's mother has found a fun way to share word books with him. It really keeps Nico's attention! On her computer, Mom put together a collection of digital photos of Nico's favorite toys and labeled each one with the toy's name. She then added her voice reading the toy's name. Nico can see and hear the names of each picture when he pushes a touch-sensitive pad. Mom holds Nico on her lap in front of the computer and shows him how to make each of the pictures "talk." The combination of pictures, words, and speech keeps Nico's attention for quite a long time. Mom helps him "turn the pages" by guiding his hand to the touch pad.

