

Believe it or not, learning to read begins at birth

Everyone wants to do the best for their baby. Looking at books with your child every day is one of the most important things you can do for her/his future. Sharing books together strengthens your child's foundation for learning. Pointing at pictures in a book, saying rhymes, singing songs, writing words, and playing together makes your child more ready for school. Your baby's ability to learn grows from interacting with you, not a screen or educational toy. Plant the seed for lifelong learning by growing a reading relationship with your baby.



Reading with your little one

There are lots of ways to read with your child. Reading can happen at bedtime, on the bus, while you are waiting for an appointment, or after a meal. Any time you have a book to read and a place to sit is a good time to look at books together. Parents, grandparents, siblings, and caring adults are all important readers for young children. Sit close with your child—in your lap, side by side, on a chair, or in bed. Point at the pictures and ask questions. Take time to listen to your child's responses. Read favorite books over and over and find new books at the library.

Using your public library

Everyone is welcome at the public library. You can read books at the library and enjoy free storytime programs for babies and young children. Getting a library card is free for you and your child. Many libraries have play areas and activities for little learners. Ask your librarian for help finding books for your young child.

Visit GrowingWisconsinReaders.org for more information about reading and libraries.



Growing Wisconsin Readers

Visit your public library to get a library card, check out books, and find out about programs for babies and children.

Find more books, tips, and facts at GrowingWisconsinReaders.org



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With support from:
The Cooperative Children's Book Center
Reach Out and Read Wisconsin
Wisconsin Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards

This project is made possible by a grant from the
U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services

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How to read effectively
with babies, toddlers, and
young children

GrowingWisconsinReaders.org

Babies (0-18 months)

At This Age

Babies enjoy and respond to repeated sounds, words, and rhymes. Babies love to imitate sounds they hear and can explore and enjoy books with their eyes, ears, and mouth. As your baby grows, she/he will point to and name pictures in a book when asked.

Reading Together

Babies recognize the faces and voices of those who are familiar to them and will begin to connect books with people she/he loves most. Make time to read every day—even for just a few minutes at a time.

Borrow or buy books that have colorful pictures and some words that relate to the pictures; for example, pictures of animals with words telling what the animal says. Model for your baby how to hold and use books properly.



A Few Authors to Enjoy

- Eric Carle
- Lucy Cousins
- Denise Fleming
- Bill Martin, Jr.
- Leslie Patricelli

The Big Picture

Like a garden that is ready to be planted, the brain of your baby is ready to learn. At this age, your baby needs to learn from you how to communicate (speak, look, listen). Talk, sing, and read to your baby. Even if it seems that your infant is not paying attention, he or she is learning how to use language from the best teacher—YOU!

Toddlers (1-3 years old)

At This Age

Toddlers repeat words in rhymes and actions. Your toddler might ask for and join in saying favorite rhymes and songs that repeat sounds and words, like “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star.” Toddlers explore, repeat, and imitate alphabet-related songs and games. They understand that words in the book carry a message. Your toddler will begin to use writing tools to make marks.

Reading Together

Toddlers have short attention spans, so it’s okay if your little one doesn’t sit with you for the whole book; some storytime is better than no storytime. While you read, point to familiar words and pictures on the page. Your child will begin to understand that words can be put together to tell the story and hold the message. Invite your toddler to hold the book and/or turn pages as you read. Ask your child open-ended questions, such as, “Why do you think this happened?”

A Few Authors to Enjoy

- Alma Flor Ada
- Byron Barton
- Donald Crews
- Helen Oxenbury
- Rosemary Wells

The Big Picture

Like a plant that is taking root in the soil, your toddler is learning about the world around her/him, even if you can’t quite easily observe all she/he knows. Your toddler’s brain needs to experiment with how things look, feel, sound, smell, and taste. Understanding colors, letters, numbers, animals, and opposites gets your child ready for school. Reading favorite books again and again helps build important brain connections.



Preschool Age (3-5 years old)

At This Age

Your child will ask you to read her/him a story in a book. Preschool-age children begin to recognize and match sounds and rhymes in familiar words. Your child will be able to tell the difference between letters and other symbols. Introduce your child to letters and their sounds in familiar words, especially in her/his own name.

Reading Together

When reading a rhyming book to a child, emphasize rhymes, such as “fat cat.” Say and point to letters in books, on puzzles or toys, and on your child’s clothing. When looking at a picture book, point to the word under the picture and ask the child, “What do you think this word says?” Praise your child for her/his attention to letters, words, and sounds.

A Few Authors to Enjoy

- Lois Ehlert
- Kevin Henkes
- Keiko Kasza
- Laura Vaccaro Seeger
- Mo Willems

The Big Picture

Your child sprouts as a learner when she/he understands that letters and pictures are symbols that tell stories. Your preschool-age child’s brain is beginning to understand basic time concepts, so picture books in which something happens over time are really enjoyable. Just as a new plant needs sunlight and water to grow, your little one needs to read many stories with you so that she/he is ready to learn how to read.



School Age (5-6 years old)

At This Age

School-age children recognize and make rhyming words. She/he knows single sounds and combinations of sounds. Your child understands that books have characters, an order of events, and story plots. She/he writes recognizable letters and begins to write her/his own name and a few words.

Reading Together

Read poetry and rhyming books to your child on a regular basis. Together with your child, enjoy chants, songs, and finger plays involving rhyming and sound substitutions. Encourage your child to tell the story by saying, “What happened in the beginning of the story? What happened next? And what happened at the end of the story?”

A Few Authors to Enjoy

- Bob Graham
- Yumi Heo
- Jerry Pinkney
- Lynn Reiser
- Carmen Tafolla

The Big Picture

Just as young plants begin to grow leaves and flowers as they get taller, your child’s learning potential will blossom at school. You are still your child’s most important teacher, and she/he needs to hear stories and encouragement from you. The routine of reading together every day protects your child from stress and helps her/him grow into a strong, independent reader.

