

Infants & Toddlers

a letter to families

NOTE TO TEACHERS: COPY THIS PAGE AND SEND HOME TO PARENTS.

Parents everywhere want to help their children be prepared for reading, writing, and other literacy experiences. Here are some ways you can work in partnership with your child's teachers so that you are both promoting preliteracy opportunities for your child:

Read bedtime stories nightly to your baby. As you read, ask your baby cheerfully, "Where is the puppy?" Express your delight as he learns to point and babble at each animal in a storybook you have read over and over.

Try interactive books. Babies like books in which they, too, can do something as you point to pictures and talk about them. Some books allow a little one to open a page flap to see a scene, or they let the toddler insert a plastic bear, for example, into a high chair or wading pool.

Help your child learn to turn pages in sequence. Hook your fingers into the top of the next page in the picture book you are reading together. Then ask your little one, "Can you turn the page, please?" Since your finger is already holding that place unobtrusively, your baby will turn the page just right, and you can say "Thank you!" in admiration as you continue talking about the next page.

Provide a special place for books for your little one. Take your infant to the library and bring home new books to read with your child every week. By the time he is a toddler, he will be able to run to his shelf and find a picture book with another alligator in it, if you are reading him a story about an alligator.

Choose books with repetition. Your child will delight and crow with pride by chanting the words out loud with you every time they appear in the story.

Let your older toddler "read" a book to you. Appreciate when your older toddler wants to turn the pages and tell you the story. He has learned story sequences and some of the rhymes. He is making good guesses from pictures about the creatures and the story line in each book.

Notice what kinds of books hold your baby's attention. Some children love books that show pictures of babies doing things in families, such as eating at a picnic or having a bath. Some babies really love books with lovable or imaginative animal characters. Tune in to your baby's preferences so that you can choose books with pictures that really hold your child's attention.

You are the gatekeeper for joy in your little one's life. As you make book sharing and story reading deeply pleasurable daily activities for your little one, you can be so proud of the special role you play, together with your child's teacher, in starting your child on a lifelong love affair with books and with reading.

Alice Sterling Honig, Ph.D., a professor emerita of child development at Syracuse University, is the author of many books, including Secure Relationships: Nurturing Infant-Toddler Attachments in Early Care Settings (NAEYC, 2002; \$15) and, with H. Brophy, Talking With Your Baby: Family as the First School (Syracuse University Press, 1996; \$16.95).