



Using books and early literacy activities for young children builds essential literacy skills. A baby may begin to learn that books and stories can be comforting, fun and interesting. These positive feelings about books may motivate a baby to want more and more interactions with books and stories.

What Does Early Literacy Research State?

1. Language, reading and writing skills develop at the same time and are intimately linked.
2. Early literacy development is a continuous developmental process that begins in the first years of life.
3. Early literacy skills develop in real life settings through positive interactions with literacy materials and other people.

In the past, little importance was placed on what children experience in the first years of life. It was believed that children learned to read and write only when they entered elementary school and received specific instruction. This does not mean that young children should be taught to read because it is not developmentally appropriate. But, it does mean that early literacy skills can be developed which lead to literacy and language development.

What Are The Early Literacy Behaviors?

Judith Shickedanz, in her book, Much More Than The ABC's, described categories of early literacy behaviors.

- 1. Book Handling Behaviors**
 - a. Behaviors related to a child's physical manipulation or handling of books, such as page turning and chewing.
- 2. Looking and Recognizing**
 - a. Behaviors relate to how children pay attention to and interact with pictures and books, such as gazing at pictures or laughing at a favorite picture.
 - b. Behaviors that show recognition of and a beginning understanding of pictures in books, such as pointing to familiar objects.
- 3. Picture and Story Comprehension**
 - a. Behaviors that show a child's understanding of picture and events in a book, such as imitating an action seen in a picture or talking about events in a story.
- 4. Story-Reading Behaviors**
 - a. Behaviors that include children's verbal interactions with books and their increasing understanding of print in books, such as babbling in imitation of reading or running fingers along printed words.

Early literacy skills are essential to literacy development and should be a focus of Lekotek play sessions. We can see that the first three years of exploring and playing with books, listening to stories, and recognizing words are truly the building blocks for language and literacy development. Skills in looking, focusing and attending are first step towards a baby being able to recognize and derive meaning from symbols and pictures.



What Infants and Toddlers Can Do

- Mouthing, turning pages, holding book upright.
- Gazing at or showing an interest in pictures, smiling at a favorite picture.
- Patting or pointing to pictures, naming pictures, matching pictures to objects, etc.
- “Book babble”, memorizing stories, running fingers along printed words. Child will understand more easily that the pictures are symbols of real objects - an important step towards understanding that groups of being read. (Adapted from Schickedanz (1999) Much More Than The ABC’s)

What Children Like in Books

- Infants 0-6 months
 - a. Stiff, cardboard Books with simple, large pictures.
 - b. Cloth and soft vinyl books with simple pictures of people or familiar objects that can go in the bath or get washed.
- Young Toddlers 6-12 months
 - a. Board books with photos of other babies, brightly colored, sturdy pages, washable
 - b. Small plastic albums of family and friend.
- Young Toddlers 12-24 months
 - a. Goodnight books for bed time
 - b. Books about saying hello or goodbye, only a few words per page
 - c. Books with simple rhymes or predictable text
 - d. Animal books
- Toddlers 2-3 years
 - a. Books that tell simple stories, bed time books, animal books
 - b. Books about counting, the alphabet, shapes or sizes
 - c. Books with their favorite TV characters and that tell simple stories
- Preschoolers 3-5
 - a. Books about children that look and live like them
 - b. Books about things in which they have a special interest such as trains, cooking, etc.
 - c. Books about making friends, simple science, and other concepts.
 - d. Books about going to school or to the doctor
 - e. Books about having brothers or sisters
 - f. Books with simple text that they can memorize or read.

Source: Adapted from *Zero to Three Brainwonders*