

Fact sheet

Centre for Community Child Health

Reading with babies and young children



Newborn babies have lots of growing and developing to do. Babies are adding new skills and knowledge all the time. That's not just a result of a growing body, but also a growing brain.

In the first three years of life your child's brain will develop more dramatically than at any other time, forming connections and pathways. One way to think about that development is that your child is laying the foundation for their brain architecture. The structure that's established in those first years forms the foundation for all of your child's learning, health and behaviour - throughout their whole life! Their brain architecture forms the pathways that influence how they will respond to experiences in the future.

First steps towards reading and writing

Emergent literacy is the name for the skills, knowledge and attitudes that need to develop as your child takes their first steps towards reading and writing skills.

The key components are:

- speaking and learning new words
- recognising letters

- recognising sounds
- learning about books, writing and how they work
- an environment with lots of language, books and stories.

When you can help your child's emergent literacy skills in the years before school - by making time to read together - you are developing the building blocks that help your child to be ready to successfully learn to read and write.

Reading together

Love and learning are two special benefits of reading together regularly. Reading together provides more opportunities for 'special time' with your child, as well as improving their future literacy skills and social and emotional development.

Words are everywhere

Lots of parents find barriers between them and reading regularly with their child. You might think you haven't got enough time to fit in reading - being a parent is busy! Perhaps you're not super confident about reading out loud. Remember:

- You don't need to find quiet reading time - words are everywhere. Things as simple as a trip in the car, a walk to the park, or a supermarket visit are all opportunities for reading.
- Join your local library and take advantage of story time and rhyme time sessions as well as the wide range of books that the library has available at no cost.

Reading together benefits your relationship with your child and your child's brain development. By fitting in a little bit of reading every day, from as early in life as you and your baby are comfortable, you can help your child to get the best start possible and put in place the building blocks for reading and writing.



Making the most of your child health visit

As a parent, you are your child's first educator and carer. You are the expert on your child. When you work in partnership with your child and family health nurse, you can strike a balance between the nurse's extensive knowledge of health information and your expertise in your own life story, interests and purpose.

When families and nurses work in partnership, you can experience:

- better clinical outcomes
- better service delivery in terms of preventive care
- referrals and treatment that are more acceptable to you because you and your nurse reached the decision together.

Great communication

Sometimes you and your child and family health nurse might experience a difference of opinion about the best decision to make about your child. This can make communication difficult. When you feel comfortable with your nurse, it can be easier to communicate well. To help build great communication:

If you're not comfortable with your nurse

Think about what's happening that's making you feel uncomfortable. Is there a way to change that? Getting to know one another can help you to feel more comfortable. Share information about how things are going and what you're interested in. Is there another way to communicate – over the phone, via email – that would be more comfortable for you?

When you have different values or opinions

Try to consider things from your nurse's perspective. Can you find any common understanding? If you can't, it's still important to acknowledge and accept your differences. Try to always show that you respect your nurse's values or opinions, even when you don't agree. Ask some questions that increase your understanding of their position.

If you're a bit hesitant because of body language and voice.

There are lots of messages we communicate without words. Think about whether your tone of voice or posture (such as crossed arms) is welcoming or not.

When you just can't find the right words

Make a note of the questions you want to ask before your visit and the best ways to ask them. Chat about your thinking with someone you trust. Consider bringing a support person if it is a planned meeting. Take your time. It's okay to come back to the conversation later if you need to. Check if the other person understands – make sure you are conveying information effectively.

If you don't feel clear on what you're being told

Ask for clarification and examples if you need to; try rephrasing and summarising in your own words.

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The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne
EMAIL publications.ccch@rch.org.au
www.rch.org.au/ccch