

Having Fun with Young Children

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Our Library offers programs for young children from birth to school-age, and we encourage families to visit whenever it works into your busy schedule. We've been doing a lot of counting and playing with numbers lately at our storytimes, as well as early science activities. In addition to reading favorite books, singing songs, learning fingerplays and other storytime basics, math and science concepts are now a part of exploring the world with young children. And because everyone likes lists (especially short ones), here's a few that relate to early learning.

Emergent Literacy Skills

About ten years ago, research came out with information about the skills children need BEFORE they learn to read. These are the skills moms and dads and grandparents and caregivers can all be doing starting at birth. Kids that start school ready to read and learn will be more successful. Here's the six literacy skills kids need before starting school:

1. Vocabulary

The words we use! Kids learn the names of things by talking and reading with caring adults. Encourage relatives, babysitters, and visitors to share books with your child. The *number* of words a child knows helps when they learn to read. . . children who enter school knowing between 3,000 and 5,000 words are at an advantage.

2. Print Awareness

This is knowing how books and print work. You can point out parts of a picture book and show that words flow from left-to-right and top-to-bottom. Familiarity with books and the look of words also helps children when they learn to read.

3. Narrative Skills

Knowing stories, and how they work, is important. Encourage your child to tell you about things that have a sequence, such as what they do when they eat breakfast or go to a birthday party. The ability to retell a favorite story is a skill necessary for reading.

4. Letter Knowledge

This is learning that letters are different from each other and each letter has a name and specific sounds. Point out letters and words each day, and help your child write his name and other familiar words. Knowing the letters of the alphabet is another important step to reading.

5. Print Motivation

A child with good print motivation enjoys being read to, plays with books, pretends to read, and likes trips to the Library. As a parent, you can ensure that reading aloud is a FUN and enjoyable time you share together.

6. Phonological Sensitivity

This is the ability to hear smaller sounds in words. It can be developed by playing word games with your child: finding rhymes ("cat" and "hat"), saying words slowly ("bas - ket"), playing with beginning sounds ("pig," "big" and "wig"), singing songs and other activities.

Early Math and Science Skills

1. Numbers

Number sense is the ability to think and work with numbers and to understand their uses and relationships. Count everything! Count steps to the door. People at the table. Shoes in the closet. Point to each object as you count, reinforcing that the last number names the amount.

2. Playing with Shapes

Geometry involves shape, size, space, position, direction, and movement. Young children learn about these by interacting with the physical world.

3. Measurement

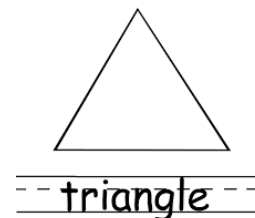
Measuring involves comparing and figuring out how long or short something is, how much something weighs, or how much something weighs, or how long it takes to do something.

4. Patterns

Patterns are formed when things are repeated a number of times. Figuring out patterns involve seeing relationships and help us understand the underlying structure of things. Talk about patterns in your day (routines), repeated phrases in songs and books, and make patterns with blocks or beads.

5. Science

Provide opportunities for child to investigate the physical world as they observe and describe the life cycle of plants, insects, and animals. Try some simple science experiments, and look at how properties change and how simple machines work.



Things We Have Found Out About How Children Learn

There's been a lot of research in the last decade about how children learn and how brains work, because of new technology that allows scientists to study infant brains. So here's a list of some of the most amazing stuff we have learned:

1. **Children learn language** by talking to real people, face-to-face. Not by watching TV or Baby Einstein videos. Not by listening to radio or music. But talking and singing and reading with real people is the key to language development. Pediatricians recommend no TV or videos for children under the age of 2. Not only do children not learn, but it can also be harmful to their brain development.
2. **Learning is relationship-based.** At least one close relationship with a caregiver in the first years of life is essential for healthy brain development. Every time a child is hugged, rocked, cuddled and responded to, the foundation is built for further brain growth. A stable and caring relationship teaches babies to feel safe and allows them to regulate emotions.
3. **Stress during the first years** can have long-term consequences for learning and behavior. Toxic stress, or prolonged exposure to high levels of stress, affects brain development and increases risk of both physical and mental illness. It's important that parents seek help and support during these early years to limit the amount of stress in the home. Short periods of stress are normal and actually help children to grow when shared with a caring adult.



4. **Play is essential** to a child's development, because children learn through play. Be sure that your child has plenty of time for free, imaginative play. It's the experience that is important, not the toy. . . so the opportunity to play with water, sand, snow, large cardboard boxes, and other natural materials is better than playing with expensive commercial toys. Spending time outside with kids is the best playroom of all!

Best Books to Share with Infants & Toddlers

1. Nursery rhymes help with steady beat, rhythm, rhyme and vocabulary. . . and they can be shared with everyone! There are great board book editions of favorite rhymes illustrated by Rosemary Wells, Annie Kubler, Jane Dyer, and Lucy Cousins.
2. Books with photographs of babies! Look for ones with engaging, realistic photos of faces, such as board books by Margaret Miller and *Baby! Talk!* By Penny Gentieu.
3. Fun books to read aloud. Anything by Sandra Boynton is as much fun for parents as kids. There are lots of silly rhymes in books like *Moo! Baa! La La La!* and *Blue Hat Green Hat*.
4. Books about animals and objects in their world will really help build a child's vocabulary. These are sometimes called "point and say" books because they include pictures of things and their names. A few of the best are *Daddy Cuddles* by Anne Gutman, *Babies on the Go* by Linda Ashman, *My Animals/Mis Animales* by Rebecca Emberly, the *bright baby* books, and the *Touch & Feel* books.
5. Every child needs a few favorite sleepytime books, ones read especially at bedtime. In addition to the beloved *Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown, try *Time for Bed* by Mem Fox and *I Love You As Much* by Laura Krauss Melmed.

Best Reasons to Visit Your Public Library

1. Other families and kids. It's important that you don't isolate yourself when you are caring for young children. Get out into social settings, meet other adults and kids, and find support for the difficult job of taking care of children.
2. Parenting materials for free. Lots of books, handouts, magazines, videos and more to help you answer the questions you may have about parenting.
3. Warm, comfortable, safe and fun place to hang out with young children. Kids can play with puzzles, look at books, play computer games, and other activities, surrounded by other families and professionals who can help you find information. "Books & Babies" and preschool storytimes are great social experiences for your child.
4. Pick up some new children's music to play and sing along with in the car. Singing with kids is really good for them. . . it's fun and helps them hear the sounds in letters and words. Audio books are fun too.
5. BOOKS! Choose a variety of children's board books, picture books, nonfiction titles about a new pet or that bug you found, along with a few books for YOU to enjoy as well.