

Helping children build early literacy skills is one of the most important things parents and caregivers can do. Long before a child enters school, their brain is rapidly growing. The way adults talk, read, and play with young children shapes how they learn, communicate, and form relationships.

## **Birth to 12 Months: Early Language Growth**

Babies begin learning language by listening to voices and watching faces. They coo, babble, and explore books by touching and looking at them. Caregivers can support learning at this age by talking about daily activities, reading books with simple, high-contrast images, and responding to a baby's sounds as if they were in a real conversation. These interactions build early brain connections that support later reading skills.

## **12 to 24 Months: Building Vocabulary**

Between the ages of one and two, toddlers start to understand more words. They may point to pictures, mimic sounds, and say a few words. Reading books with short phrases and rhymes, labeling everyday objects, and singing together all help toddlers build vocabulary and confidence.

## **24 to 36 Months: Early Reading Skills**

By age two to three, children begin recognizing letters, noticing rhymes, and retelling simple stories. Caregivers can ask questions like “What do you think will happen next?” or point out letters on signs and labels. Pretend play also helps them understand stories and use their imagination.

## **Use Everyday Moments to Teach**

Everyday outings are great chances to learn. At the grocery store, children can hear new words, see colors, and practice counting. At the park, they build motor skills and interact with others. These real-world experiences are more valuable for learning than screen time.

## **Create a Simple Nightly Routine**

A simple routine can also make literacy a habit. The “Brush, Book, Bed” approach—brush teeth, read a book, then go to bed—helps families build reading into their daily routine. Even 15 minutes of daily reading helps children grow their vocabulary, build strong bonds, and enjoy books.

## **Watch for Early Delays**

Caregivers should also watch for early signs of delay, such as limited babbling, failure to respond to voices, or little interest in books by age three. Early support can make a big difference.

## Read, Talk, Play: Simple Steps for Smarter Kids

TARA SOLOMON-SMITH – FAMILY & COMMUNITY WELLNESS AGENT

Information from today's article came from the K-State Extension Fact sheet, *Early Literacy: Building the Foundation for Lifelong Learning*. Please contact Tara Solomon-Smith at [tsolomon@ksu.edu](mailto:tsolomon@ksu.edu) or 620-244-3826.

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