



I. Why Books Are Important

Sharing books with young children can be one of the most pleasurable times of your day. Holding a child in your lap while one or two others snuggle next to you gives the children and you a chance to relax, talk, look at illustrations, and share an intimate moment. Books open up the world to children. Through pictures and stories, children clarify ideas and feelings. They hear about people who are just like them and people who are different. They are introduced to new worlds, ideas, and places. Books can soothe an upset child, make a child laugh, and excite a child's imagination.



Books also play a major role in helping children grow up to be readers. Research tells us that children who are used to being around books when they are young are likely to become good readers when they get to school. They're also likely to enjoy reading throughout their lives. By sharing books with children when they are very young, you can set the stage for success in school and a lifetime of good reading habits.



Here are some examples of the ways in which children learn from books.

Children develop thinking skills by:

- learning to understand symbols (pointing to a picture of a boy, learning the written “boy,” and relating both to a real-life boy).
- learning vocabulary (naming an object “dog” when you point to a picture of a collie in a book).
- anticipating events (telling you what’s about to happen in a story you are reading together).
- learning to count (pointing to objects while you read a counting book out loud).
- learning to recognize colors and shapes (pointing to objects and labeling them for you as you are reading out loud).
- applying knowledge (making up nonsense rhymes after reading verses together).

Children develop socially by:

- learning to share (inviting another child to hear a story you are reading out loud).
- trying out different roles (acting out stories through dramatic play).
- showing concern (discussing books about people who are differently abled, have suffered prejudice, who are hurt in some way, or who face a challenge).

Children develop emotionally by:

- working through fears (listening to a story about children or animals going through rough times such as their parents’ divorce, sibling rivalry, a death in the family, a friend moving away, being angry, etc.).
- feeling good about themselves (discussing how they like characters who are strong and happy).
- showing compassion for others (identifying strongly with story characters and their problems).

Children develop physically by:

- developing their small muscles (turning pages in a book).
- strengthening their eye muscles (following pictures and words in a book).
- coordinating their eye and hand movements (pointing to objects as you name them in a picture book).

As you read to children and encourage them to look at books, you’ll find that there are any number of ways in which books can be used to encourage children’s growth and development. In the next section we’ll focus on choosing appropriate books and how you can set up the environment in your family child care home to support children’s development.