



**BabyRead Columns
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**2018
(January – June)**

**2018 Journal Column
Table of Contents**

January	<i>Reading, rhyming, singing and talking</i>	Reading & Rhyming Benefits
February	No column	
March	<i>Be smart: talk with your baby</i>	Talk With Your Baby
April	<i>Read aloud to your baby</i>	Reading Aloud Benefits
May	<i>A BabyRead Family, Brandon, Alli and Anna</i>	BabyRead Family Profile
June	<i>Austin, Olivia, Micale: A BabyRead family</i>	BabyRead Family Profile
July	<i>Babies' health and cellphones</i>	Technology Impact
August	<i>Babies, toddlers and technology</i>	Technology Impact
September	<i>More on babies, toddlers and technology</i>	Technology Impact
October	<i>Nicole, Isabella and Ryker</i>	BabyRead Family Profile
November	<i>Reading is a hug</i>	Building Pre-Literacy Skills
December	<i>BabyRead donates books to Early Head Start</i>	BabyRead & Head Start

Reading, rhyming, singing and talking

“Reading, rhyming, singing and talking to babies — beginning from birth — will profoundly influence literacy and language development, the foundations for all other learning. The results last a lifetime.”

BabyRead was founded on the well-established fact that children who are read to from birth will do better in school



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and later in life than children who are not familiar with books when they come to school.

BabyRead focuses on babies from birth to 18 months because the brain of a child grows more than during 18 months through 18 years. Amazing, isn't it? Many people believe that children first learn to read and write in kindergarten or first grade.

However, the foundation for literacy skills is laid years before children enter school. Parents/caretakers need to engage a child's senses right from birth. Singing, rhyming and talking are very important. Babies develop listening skills and an interest in sounds and words from this activity.

Eventually a baby learns to understand certain patterns of sounds and tries to reproduce them, which marks the beginning of personal expression and two-way communication. Reading books aloud, showing pictures and letting infants handle written materials encourages children to learn visual recognition and to identify what they hear with what they see.

No one expects an infant to read, but simply having a book in her hands starts the process of getting familiar with books — an important and normal part of developing early literacy skills for very young children is repetition. They may want to read the same storybook or look at the same pictures over and over. But this activity is actually “hard-wiring” their brains and providing consistent stimulation for language development, the cornerstone of literacy.

Literacy begins in the lap of a loving parent or caregiver who takes the time to personally interact with their infant. “Some parents may have reading problems themselves, so reading out loud to their children may be intimidating. In those cases — even if a parent just looks at a book and comments on the pictures with their child, asks the child questions about what's going on in the pictures — that's still ‘reading.’”

“The most important thing parents or caretakers do by reading with their infants, toddlers and preschoolers is to teach them to love books and stories so much that they will be motivated to learn to read.” (All quotes from healthychildren.org)

BabyRead is a group of volunteers who read with moms and other caregivers of babies from birth to 18 months in Oconee County. We meet twice each month at public or school libraries for one hour and give a free book and snack each time we meet. We coach moms/caregivers to enhance their reading with songs, nursery rhymes and finger plays, helpful in holding a child's attention.

TO LEARN more, contact director Caren von Hippel at babyread@charter.net or (864) 944-7881 or go to babyread.org.

No Feb 2018 Column

Be smart: talk with your baby

Research has demonstrated a 30 million word gap in the number of words heard between children who have few to no books in their home and those children who have many books in their home (B. Hart & Risley, "The Early Catastrophe: The 30 Million Word Gap by Age 3").

Children with few to no books at home and who typically are not read to before entering school are often "behind" in kindergarten and then "behind" in third grade.



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These children often never catch up. They may not graduate from high school. If they do, it is with limited skills and limited job opportunities. Babyread's goal is to close this gap.

What does a 30 million word gap mean? It refers to the amount of language a child hears before he/she comes to school. It means that some children have not learned before they come to school to be comfortable with books or learn that a story has a beginning, a middle and an end.

They have not learned the joy of hearing a story! "MIT cognitive scientists have now found that conversation between an adult and a child appears to change the child's brain, and this back-and-forth conversation is actually more critical to language development than the word gap." (M.I.T. News, 2.2018).

When adults talk to their children about their socks being "pink" and "stretched out," and that the bananas in the supermarket are "yellow," the apples are "red" and "hard," and called "delicious," they are teaching vocabulary. When mom and her toddler play "The itsy bitsy spider went up the water spout," besides having fun, the child learns vocabulary and sentence structure. The M.I.T. findings fit with the "serve and return" concept we have discussed — listen to your child and respond. Talk with your child about everything you do, giving him/her your attention and a rich vocabulary. Answer her/his questions or gestures.

These are the pre-literacy skills needed to learn how to read in school. There are no electronic gadgets in this world. There are human beings paying attention to children. Electronic gadgets — TVs, cellphones, iPads — are harmful to little children.

Why read to a baby who doesn't understand one word you are reading? Even though babies do not understand the words, reading to babies helps them to learn the sounds, rhythm, grammar and intonations of their native language. And babies, like adults, understand many more words than they can speak.

Research on the brain demonstrates that when you read and talk to an infant you are building pathways in the brain. The brain grows. This leads to academic success.

BABYREAD'S GOAL is to read with children from birth to 2 years old, when the brain grows the most. We read twice a month in public libraries and schools. To help or join, contact director Caren von Hippel, Ph.D., at babyread@charter.net, (864) 944-7881 or www.babyread.org.

Read aloud to your baby

Whatever your age, who doesn't like hearing a good story?

Most of us can remember being read to by a parent or listening to stories on the radio or on a tape or by a teacher. Babies love to be read to. They especially love the soothing sound of their parents/caretakers' voices or big brother's/sister's voice.



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As soon as one little 8-month-old boy's 6-year-old sister came home from elementary school and he heard her in the house, he would shake his play pen and cry out. He want her to come into his room and read him a story.

“When we look back on our childhood, some of us have fond memories of being read to, of snuggling up and enjoying a favorite story with the people who love us. And it's not so much the story that we remember, but the feeling of love and security that it gave us. “Reading aloud is a great way of engaging with babies and young children. What happens during the first few years sets the stage for the rest of a child's life. It is a time when a child's experiences irreversibly affect how the brain develops — for better or worse. Nurturing from a loving parent or caregiver in the early years supports healthy brain development that forms the foundation for success later at school and in life. One of the best ways of engaging with babies and young children is through looking at books

together. Even the youngest baby loves to be held close and hear the voice of their Mom or Dad (or brother or sister) as they read a book aloud.”

Reading aloud promotes language development and early literacy skills. Reading aloud and sharing books with babies and toddlers teaches them “book handling and naming, understanding how books work (e.g. how to turn the pages, that the words on the pages describe the pictures), recognition of sounds and letters, knowledge of a wide range of vocabulary, and an ability to listen” and following the sequence of the story.

Reading aloud also “builds motivation, curiosity and memory; helps babies and toddlers cope during times of stress or anxiety; takes children to places and times they have never been, enlarging and enhancing their worlds; and creates a positive association with books and reading.” (All quotes are from “The Importance of Reading Aloud,” web page of Reach Out and Read.)

The skills described above are essential for children to learn before they start school and learn to read. This is what BabyRead coaches moms/caretakers and babies about.

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A BabyRead Family: Brandon, Alli and Anna

This month we meet one of BabyRead's families — Brandon, his mom, Alli, and his great-grandmother, Anna.

Brandon is an adorable 2 1/2 year old. When they enter the Seneca library, Brandon slips his hand out of the hand of Chellye, his BabyRead reader, so that he can lead the way



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to the conference room where they meet twice a month to read books, sing songs and do finger plays, like the "Itsy Bitsy Spider." Anna, his great-grandmother, says it has been wonderful to observe his development over the 10 months he has been in BabyRead. He has learned his colors, shapes, most letters and much more. He has developed an incredible attention span for a toddler. He and Chellye generally read five to seven books before taking a break for finger plays, songs or a snack. Chellye has observed a significant increase in his attention span over time. While some of this is due to maturing, most can be credited to his exposure to books.

Brandon is a lucky little boy, surrounded by loving caretakers. He lives with his maternal grandmother while his mom, Alli, is attending college. Most days Anna picks him up early, reads to him (he demands books before breakfast!), feeds him and delivers him to Early Head Start. She often cares for him in the afternoons, too, and is faithful about getting him to the library to read with Chellye.

Brandon's mom is quite an achiever. She's a junior at Anderson College and a member of the track team. She maintains an excellent GPA in spite of the practice and travel demands of running track. She hopes to enter the sports medicine field upon graduation and continue to reside in the Upstate, her family's home for five generations.

Anna is a real fan of BabyRead. She said she has loved "seeing Brandon's little mind open" and gain self-confidence. Having heard Caren talk about BabyRead at Early Head Start, Anna immediately signed up for the program. She wants Brandon to have every advantage in school and for success in life, and feels strongly that reading is essential to the achievement of these goals. Even before birth, Brandon's mom was reading to him in the womb!

Anna hears the phrase, "Read a book," VERY often. While Brandon also loves running and playing, watching "Cars" and "Roy Rogers and The Lone Ranger," reading books is definitely one of his favorite activities. While he loves getting to take a book home, he often returns to "old favorites" before settling in with the new one. Before long, the new book becomes one of the "old favorites," too.

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Austin, Olivia, Micale: A BabyRead family

This month let me introduce you to another BabyRead family, 14-month-old Austin, his mom, Olivia, and his dad, Micale. Austin is affectionate and cheerful, surely reflecting his loving home and the care of an extended family. His mom, Olivia, exudes a joyful spirit in her sweet, thoughtful and quiet demeanor.



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Olivia has three brothers and two sisters and came to the Upstate from Florida when she was 12 years old. Micale's family also lives close by. His sister cares for Austin, along with her 3-year-old son, while his parents work. Olivia was recently promoted into a full-time position in the Oconee County legal department while Micale is a director at a program for at-risk teenagers.

Olivia first heard about BabyRead when she attended a literacy event at James M. Brown Elementary School before Austin was born. Since she was read to as a child and she loves to read herself, she immediately signed up. She and BabyRead reader Judy began reading to Austin together, both in English and in Spanish, when he was only three months old. The results are evident. Austin delights in his basket of books at home, often entertaining himself by turning the book's pages, pointing to the pictures and jabbering away.

As Austin is an only child and has been involved in BabyRead since he was an infant, it is difficult to gauge exactly what effect being read to has had upon him, but Olivia thinks "it has increased his attention span and ability to focus, his comfort and love of books and will increase his vocabulary and language development."

He is just beginning to talk, sometimes verbalizing in English and sometimes in Spanish. She and Micale make reading part of Austin's nightly bedtime routine. When BabyRead printed 5,000 new bookmarks with a picture of Olivia reading to Austin on them to distribute throughout the Oconee County school system, she was so thrilled she asked for and was given 30 to hand out to family and friends at work.

"BabyRead has broadened not only Austin's world, but also mine," Olivia said. She and Judy have developed a wonderful relationship. She looks forward to their twice-monthly sessions at the Seneca public library. As with all families and volunteers, there are times when it is a challenge to get together, but Olivia says "Judy's flexibility is a big plus in making that happen."

BABYREAD'S GOAL is to encourage moms/caregivers with babies from birth to two years to read to their children daily when the brain grows the most. And then keep it up. Our volunteers read twice a month with moms/caregivers in public libraries and schools and give a free book and free snack each time we meet. We help them enhance reading with songs, nursery rhymes and finger plays, which hold a preschool child's attention. To help, contact our director Caren von Hippel, Ph.D., at babyread@charter.net or (864) 944-7881 or our website: www.babyread.org.