



**BabyRead Columns
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**2017 Journal Column
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All moms need to know is how to talk

I was standing by our table at Blue Ridge Elementary School ready to sign up families for BabyRead. A mom, Dorothy, holding a little baby, came up and looked at our poster, books and bunnies. She asked me shyly, “What if my reading is not so good? Will you read to me and my baby?”



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The books BabyRead uses have just one or two words under the pictures on each page. While it is certainly good if the mom can read the words under the pictures, the mom doesn't have to read the words in the story to help build her child's brain and help her child develop pre-literacy skills.

All the moms need to know is how to talk! The specific language does not matter. The mom should talk in the language she is most comfortable in. A mom can easily just describe the pictures in the story if reading is difficult for her. She can say: “See the elephant and the bushes. Look at the green grass and how much that big, gray elephant is eating. He must be very hungry.”

Studies show that many preschool children in homes without books listen to as many as 30 million fewer words than children in homes with many books because in the latter the parents are engaged in lengthy, regular conversations with their children rather than using short sentences like “Do this,” “Quit that,” and “Stop that.”

When you take your baby grocery shopping, describe the world around her/him. Talk about the different names, colors and shapes of the foods you are putting into your cart. When you are making dinner or sorting the laundry, do the same: “This sock is green and this small sock is pink. Here is a second small, pink sock so they go together.” Even if your child is just babbling and cooing, you should be talking to him/her. You will be building his/her brain.

Read every day to your child from birth. The brain grows more between 1 and 18 months than between 18 months and 18 years, and reading stimulates brain development. Language and conversations between adults and babies, listening to babies and responding to them and going back and forth — they coo and you say something, they babble more and you say more — helps develop their brains.

BabyRead is a group of volunteers who read with moms and other caregivers of babies 18 months and younger who live in Oconee County. We meet twice each month at public or school libraries and give a free book and free snack each time we meet. We teach moms/caregivers to enhance their reading with songs, nursery rhymes and finger plays, important to many skills including holding a child's attention.

IF YOU would like to learn more or help us, please contact our director, Caren von Hippel at babyread@charter.net or (864) 944-7881 or go to www.babyread.org.

The importance of reading to children every day

This month I want to share Veronica and Sophia's story with you. Here it is in Veronica's own words:

"I was so enthusiastic when I signed myself and my 3-month-old daughter Sophia up for BabyRead. Sophia was shy, and I wanted to learn about reading to her. But my house cleaning schedule was erratic, I missed several scheduled reading sessions and soon I had to drop out of BabyRead.



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"So Caren, BabyRead's director, was surprised to see me the following year at Blue Ridge Elementary signing up again for BabyRead. "I asked Caren, 'If one of my readers calls you on a Sunday to schedule a reading session, will you know your schedule for the week?' She said yes. Now I know my house cleaning work schedule one week in advance, so Sophia and I joined BabyRead again, and it has been great.

"My friends says Sophia is a lucky little girl that I have known the importance of books in a child's life since before she was born. Although we have few books in our home, Sophia is always excited when she is going to meet her reader, Miss Betty. As soon as I say 'We're going to see Miss Betty today,' Sophia immediately responds with 'books!'

It is obvious that she looks forward to hearing the stories, and especially to picking which of the books can become her very own at the end of each session. At each BabyRead meeting, Sophia and I pick one book to take home with us for free.

"Sophia loves books and carries them with her wherever she goes, even having some in the car when we go out. She often 'reads' to her two older sisters, mom or dad, interpreting the pictures in the book. Recently she started naming the animals in the ABC book she received from BabyRead.

"BabyRead has reinforced my belief in the importance of reading to children every day. Although Sophia, my third child, is exposed to TV, she has little interest in it. She is too busy to sit and watch a program, preferring to play. I am delighted because I have learned from Miss Betty that it is much better to read, recite nursery rhymes, sing songs, or just talk to a young child than it is to let them watch TV. I know the loving attention I give Sophia is what really matters."

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Pamela, Nico and Charlie's story

This month I want to share with you Pamela, Nico and Charlie's story. Here are Pamela's own words:

"I learned about BabyRead at Kids Fest at James M. Brown Elementary School in Walhalla. Nico was 2 months old at the time. A BabyRead volunteer explained: 'The brain grows the most between birth and 18 months, and



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reading stimulates brain development.' Wow! I decided now was a perfect time to sign up for BabyRead because Nico was so young!"

Nico is Pamela and Charlie's first child and the focus of much of their attention. Pamela is a "stay-at-home" mom whose natural tendencies are to talk to her child. Dolly and Bob are a married couple who are BabyRead readers.

Bob speaks fluent Spanish, which he learned during his time in the Army. Pamela is bilingual in English and Spanish. She wants Nico to learn both English and Spanish. Bob reads in both languages to Nico. They have counseled Pamela and Charlie to keep Nico away from the TV as much as possible because it is just noise and distracting to babies.

"BabyRead has had a big impact on our family," said Pamela. "We read, sing and talk to Nico every day. I think Nico has such a cheerful disposition because of the love and attention we give him when either Charlie or I read to him so often. We cuddle him on our lap. Nico calms down when we read to him, especially at bedtime. Charlie

has adopted the habit of pointing to the words as he holds and reads to Nico, hoping to help him start to recognize sight words at a young age."

Nico is a lucky child — he gets a lot of loving attention.

"I am hoping to remain in BabyRead until Nico goes to school," said Pamela.

This is fine with the BabyRead program.

Pamela understands from Dolly and Bob that "It's what I and Charlie do every day that makes the difference to Nico. I love the free books I get from Dolly and Bob. Nico especially likes the touch-and-feel ones. And Dolly and Bob have shown me some things I can do while I read to hold Nico's attention.

"Dolly and Bob also have explained to me the importance of talking to Nico about everything I do and he sees around him and giving him names for everything in the world."

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Turn off your TV

With TVs in almost every home in America, should you be letting your baby watch TV? Many moms do. BabyRead says emphatically “No.”

This is confirmed by the American Academy of Pediatricians who say that “children 2 years and younger should watch no TV.” Yet, surveys suggest that 92 percent of 1-year-olds have already watched TV and/or used a mobile



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device, some starting as young as 4 months (healthychildren.org)

Healthychildren.org states: “I hear a lot of parents say: ‘But my baby likes it.’ Infants may stare at the bright colors and motion on the screen, but their brains are incapable of making sense or meaning out of all those bizarre pictures. It takes around 18 months for a baby’s brain to develop to the point where the symbols on a screen come to represent their equivalents in the real world.”

What do babies need? The period under 2 years of age is a window of opportunity for the family to nurture the baby. Babies need interaction with people around them — they need to be talked with, held and read to. “When it comes to day-to-day learning, they need to touch things, shake them, throw them, and, most of all, to see the faces and hear the voices of those they love the most.” (healthychildren.org)

This is a critical time for moms, dads, grandparents and others to talk and read every day with your baby. This promotes brain development. It will make your baby healthy and smart.

“Good evidence suggests that screen viewing (of electronic gadgets) before age 18 months has lasting negative effects on children’s language development, reading skills and short-term memory. It also contributes to problems with sleep and attention. The problem lies not only with what toddlers are doing while they’re watching TV, it’s what they aren’t doing. Specifically, children are programmed to learn from interacting with other people. The dance of facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language between a toddler and a parent is ... complex. Whenever one party to this dance, child or parent, is watching TV, the exchange comes to a halt.

“Just having the TV on in the background, even if ‘no one is watching it’ is enough to delay language development. Normally a parent speaks 940 words per hour when a toddler is around. With the television on, that number falls by 770! Fewer words means less learning.” (healthychildren.org)

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BabyRead is for the whole family

The BabyRead program affects the whole family, not just the mom and the little baby. Often everyone in the family becomes more enthusiastic about and interested in reading. This is the magic of participating in BabyRead.

Our volunteer readers are enthusiastic and committed to our goals of coaching moms in reading every day to their babies and toddlers; and raising awareness that reading to babies builds their brains. Their enthusiasm is contagious. And reading is such fun! Babies and toddlers, moms and dads, grandmoms and great-grandmoms discover this, and laugh and sing and have a great time reading the stories and seeing the colorful pictures in our hard board books.



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Just ask Maria V. or her husband, Alexander, or her 9-year-old daughter Mia, or her 11-year-old son Alexander, or her now 3-year-old daughter Alia. They have been in BabyRead for almost two years now, having joined when Alia was less than a year old. They sometimes meet with their BabyRead volunteer reader at the Walhalla public library in the late afternoon when Dad and Alexander and Mia can join them. Maria says that Alia is all smiles when she is going to BabyRead, and knows she will be coming home with a new book for her home library.

Another family, Paige E. and Benjamin, have been having reading sessions at a local library with a BabyRead volunteer for seven months now. Benjamin started BabyRead last fall, when he was 13 months old. Right after each reading session, they take the book they got free from BabyRead and go to Dad's to have dinner. Papaw reads Benjamin the book he got that day. Mom, Dad and Benjamin all reading and sharing together — an important bonding experience for Benjamin. Or Alice J., her daughter, Cathy, and her granddaughter, Kara. Alice and Kara meet during the week with the BabyRead family reader because Cathy works full-time. But on weekends, Cathy joins her mom and daughter so they can all read together.

Other families sometimes meet after school so that an older child can attend the reading sessions. Older siblings as young as 6 enjoy helping read to the baby, along with the mom and the BabyRead volunteer. If the mom has several preschool aged children, she brings them all to the BabyRead reading sessions.

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