



**BabyRead Columns  
In  
*The Journal*  
Seneca, SC  
(Chronological Order)**

**2017  
(July – December)**

**2017 Journal Column  
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## *The importance of nursery rhymes*

Nursery rhymes are key in BabyRead. “Experts in literacy and child development have discovered that if children know eight nursery rhymes by heart by the time they’re 4 years old, they’re usually among the best readers by the time they’re 8.” (Fox, M. 2001 Reading Magic. San Diego, CA. Harcourt.)



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These children have become more attuned to the sounds of their language, and they often have a richer vocabulary.

“When using nursery songs and rhymes with your child, you are engaged in a social routine that encourages turn-taking skills, which are critical for the development of conversation.”

This language activity of taking turns — your child “talks/coos” and then you respond — “is extremely important in bonding, social, and brain development. “You foster responsiveness and, through repetition, you help your child learn to anticipate what’s coming next. Young children are able to respond to rhythm and tone before they understand language, and both have a common foundation of tone patterns, stress and rhythm. The words used in nursery rhymes and songs help a child develop language comprehension as they learn to associate key words with people, objects, and events in their daily lives.” (2010, kbyueleven.org)

BabyRead volunteers coach moms and grandmoms they read with to use nursery rhymes and songs as they read to their babies and toddlers. We also give families who are with BabyRead for at least six sessions a CD player with CDs of nursery rhymes and songs.

Rhymes teach: (1) language development — as children recite or listen to nursery rhymes, they learn new vocabulary and practice the rhythm and grammar of their language without even knowing it; (2) pre-reading skills such as following the sequence of the narrative, cause and effect, and problem and solution; (3) math concepts such as counting in “One little piggy, two little piggies, three little piggies ...”; (4) comfort and support as they are places children can retreat to; (5) creative dramatization: children love to act out the rhymes; (6) are just lots of fun for babies and toddlers. (the measuredmom.org and 2010 kbyueleven.org)

Do these nursery rhymes sound familiar? “Baa, Baa Black Sheep,” “A-Tisket, A-Tasket,” “Hickory, Dickory Dock,” “Humpty Dumpty,” “Little Bo Peep,” “Mary Had A Little Lamb,” “London Bridge is Falling Down” and “Mary, Mary Quite Contrary.”

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**TO LEARN** more, contact director Caren von Hippel at [babyread@charter.net](mailto:babyread@charter.net) or (864) 944-7881 or go to [www.babyread.org](http://www.babyread.org).

## *The importance of nursery rhymes*

Nursery rhymes are so important to babies, toddlers and all preschool children that I am going to talk about it again in this month's column.

Listening comprehension comes before reading comprehension. "In 1945 the average elementary school child had a vocabulary of 10,000 words; today's children have an average vocabulary of only 2,500



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words." (Tony Stead, senior literacy consultant, Mondo Publishing, (2010 kbyueleven.org) Many parents today are not reading to their children anymore. This is certainly true in families that do not have many books in their homes and in families with both parents working.

"A lot of the problems ... come from children not memorizing rhymes, the bread-and-butter of traditional early chil-

dren's literature .... In order for a children to understand what they are reading they have to be able to hear the language first. A lot of the traditional rhymes such as 'Jack and Jill' and 'Humpty Dumpty' were repetitious and allowed us to memorize the basic structures and patterns in the English language, then put it together. It's important that young children learn to memorize through verse." (2010 kbyueleven.org)

"Jack and Jill went up the hill, To fetch a pail of water, Jack fell down and broke his crown,

"And Jill came tumbling after." This contains at least three words not used in everyday conversation: "fetch," "crown" and "tumbling." Or, "Mary, Mary, quite contrary, How does your garden grow? With silver bells, and cockle shells, and pretty maids, all in a row." "Contrary" and "cockle" are words most children have not heard at home. Even a little baby who isn't yet talking can hear the rhythm of English is exposed to all this vocabulary and delights in all these rhyming words. Also nursery rhymes encourage movement, which babies and toddlers love.

Keep in mind the basic premise of BabyRead: A person's brain grows more between birth and 18 months than between 18 months and 18 years and reading stimulates brain development. All uses of language — reading, singing, talking, singing nursery rhymes — stimulate your child's brain development. But it is your social engagement and interaction with your baby/toddler that is key to your's child's development and success. Singing nursery rhymes are a way to use oral language with your child — having him/her listen or join in with you and for everyone to have a good time.

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## *Brain-building serve and return*

What is “serve and return” and why is it important to building babies’ brains?

The back and forth interactions between babies and adults is called “serve and return.” But what is this all about? Today I will discuss the first three of five steps for “serve and return” and



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what it means for you as a parent or other caregiver.

The following steps are from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University.

“Step 1: Notice the serve and share of the child’s focus of attention. Is the child looking or pointing at something? Making a sound or facial expression? Moving her arms or legs? That’s a serve. The key is

to pay attention to what the child is focused on. You can’t spend all your time doing this, so look for small opportunities throughout the day — like while you’re getting him dressed or waiting in line in the store.

“Why? By noticing serves, you’ll learn a lot about a child’s abilities, interests and needs. You’ll encourage her to explore and you’ll strengthen the bond between you.

“Step 2: Return the serve by supporting and encouraging. You can offer comfort with a hug and gentle words, help him, play with him, or acknowledge him. You can make a sound or facial expression — like saying ‘I see!’ or smiling and nodding to let her know you’re noticing the same thing. Or pick up the object she is pointing to and give it to her.

“Why? Supporting and encouraging rewards a child’s interests and curiosity. Never getting a return can actually be stressful for a child. By returning the serve, the child knows his thoughts and feelings are being heard and understood.

“Step 3: Give it a name. When you return a child’s serve by naming what she is seeing, doing or feeling, you make important language connections in her brain, even before she can talk or understand your words. You can name anything — a person, a thing, an action, a feeling or a combination. If a child points to her feet, you can also point to them and say, ‘Yes, those are your feet.’

“Why? When you name what a child is focused on, you help him understand the world around him and know what to expect. Naming also gives him words to use himself and lets him know you care.”

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## *Serve and return*

Did you know that building a child's developing brain can be helped by a game of peek-a-boo?

This month I am going to continue discussing "serve and return," what it means, and how it builds babies' brains. Serve and return is the back and forth interaction between adults and babies — like if your baby points to his foot and you say "I see your cute toes."



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dressing your baby or are in the supermarket.

Step 2: "Return the serve by supporting and encouraging with a hug, gentle words, a smile, or "I see." Let your child know you notice what he did.

Step 3: "Give it a name. When you return a child's serve by naming what the child is seeing, doing or feeling, you build important connections in your child's brain, even before your child can talk or understand words." If your child points to his new shoes, say "Yes, new pink shoes."

Step 4: "Take turns ... and wait. Keep the interaction going back and forth. Every time you return a serve, give the child a chance to response. Taking turns can be quick — from the child to you and back again —

To summarize Steps 1 to 3 from last month's column:

Step 1: "Notice the serve and share the child's focus of attention. Is your child looking or pointing at something? Making a sound or facial expressing? Moving his arms or legs? That is a serve. Notice this during your day, for example, while you're

and go on for many turns. Waiting is crucial. Children need time to form their responses. Why? Taking turns helps children learn self-control and how to get along with others. By waiting, you give the child time to develop his ideas and build his confidence and independence. Waiting also helps you understand his needs.

Step 5: Practice endings and beginnings. Children signal when they're done or ready to move on to a new activity. They might let go of a toy, pick up a new one, or turn to look at something else, or they may walk away or start to fuss.

Why? When you can find moments for a child to take the lead, you support her in exploring her world, and make more serve and return interactions possible." (All quotes are from Harvard University's Center for Developing Child.)

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## *Reading is a hug*

What is literacy? Simply, it is our ability to read and write and learn.

Many people believe that children learn to read and write in kindergarten or first grade. However, the foundation for literacy skills is laid starting at birth.

There are many things a parent or caregiver can do to help a child's brain and language development skills develop. We have talked about many of these in past columns: reading to a child, singing



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nursery rhymes and songs, the engagement of “serve and return.”

“No one expects an infant to read, but simply having a book in her hands can start the process of getting familiar with books and reading materials.” \*

An important and normal part of developing early literacy skills for babies and toddlers is repetition. They want to hear the same story

again and again.

“But this activity is actually ‘hard-wiring’ their brains and providing consistent stimulation for language development, the cornerstone of literacy.”

To actually change the “hard-wiring” in a child's brain is a big deal. The parent or caregiver's reading — using language and engaging with the young child — is able to do this because the neural connections in the brain are still growing in the very young baby.

“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 that 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, ask the child questions about what's going on in the pictures — that's still ‘reading.’”

The motivation for children to read is the fun of listening to the story. This is heightened by the bond created between the parent or caregiver. Reading together usually creates a warm, nurturing and loving relationship between the child and the reader. It is wonderful if a parent or caregiver can create routines around reading such as having a bath, then reading a bedtime story like “The Hungry Caterpillar” each night (until the child wants another story), and then the child goes to sleep. This bedtime story routine gives your child something to look forward to, is consistent, predictable and helps build self-confidence in your child, as well as develops his love of reading. Soon you will be reading several bedtime stories each night.

For babies and toddlers, part of the power of reading is that it should be a bonding experience between parent or caregiver and child. Sure, strollers are very useful. But pick up and hug your child often as you read to him during the day or at bedtime. Reading is also a playful time. Many stories are fun and playful. Joke around with your child and with words. You can ask your child lots of questions about the story and listen to her answer. Reading is a hug.

(\* Quotes from The BabyCenter.org)

**BABYREAD'S GOAL** is to read with children and their moms starting at birth. We hope to make a difference in the lives of the next generation of Oconee County residents. If you would like to help us, please contact our director, Caren von Hippel at [babyread@charter.net](mailto:babyread@charter.net) or (864) 944-7881. You can learn more by going to [babyread.org](http://babyread.org).

## *Reading lifts the spirit*

This month, let's visit with one of BabyRead's families — Alicia, the mom, her toddler, Alexa, who is now almost 2 years old, her two older brothers, Kayden, 5 years old and Kristian, 7 years old, and their dad, Henry. Alicia has been meeting with her BabyRead family reader, Diane, for almost a year now.



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Alicia and Diane meet twice each month whenever their schedules permit. This past fall was difficult with car problems on Alicia's side and grandchildren's duties on Diane's side.

Alicia is so enthusiastic about BabyRead that she says: "I would love to meet once a week." Both Henry and Alicia are grateful for the books that BabyRead gives them.

Alicia and Henry first learned about BabyRead a year ago when they were at Blue Ridge Elementary School, signing Kayden up for pre-K. The idea of reading to an infant was new to them, but desiring the very best for their children, they immediately signed up.

Alicia said: "Prior to meeting with Diane and BabyRead, I was not conversational with infants. Now, I constantly engage all three of my children in conversation. I have learned that this is a key to language development." This pre-literacy skill is the foundation of later learning how to read.

Alexa loves her books, saying "up, up" when she sees a book and demanding to be read to, and when a book is finished she jumps down to fetch another one.

Sometimes, the older boys join them. Alicia says this has resulted in a lot more interest in books by her sons. Alicia did not read to her children before participating in BabyRead. Now they read two or three books each night.

While BabyRead has engendered a greater interest in reading by the whole family, it has opened up so much more of the world for them. Alicia has gained much more self-confidence and is leading her family to explore everything that is available in the Upstate.

For example, they had a delightful visit to the geology museum at the S.C. Botanical Garden. Alicia attributes her growth in self-confidence to her relationship with Diane. She says, "she treats me like I am part of her family — like a sister." In August, Alicia started the Family Literacy Program pursuing her GED, and using their daycare program for Alexa. Her attendance has been erratic because family issues unfortunately intrude — her life is difficult. We hope she continues, because she loves the GED program.

An added bonus is the boom box and CDs the family received from BabyRead after their sixth session. They listen to nursery rhymes and songs, at home and in the car.

**BABYREAD'S GOAL** is to read with children and their moms starting at birth to 2 years old, when the brain is growing the most. If you would like to help us, contact director Caren von Hippel, Ph.D., at [babyread@charter.net](mailto:babyread@charter.net) or (864) 944-7881. You can learn more by going to [babyread.org](http://babyread.org).