



**BabyRead Columns  
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**July – December  
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**2023 *Journal* Column (July – December)**  
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## Why we teach babies animal sounds

If you've gotten excited about a toddler's exuberant "woof!" when they spot a dog, you're not alone. Connecting with toddlers using animal sounds helps with early language development. There is almost an obsession to get babies and toddlers to say "moo" or "baa!"

According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), babies start babbling around 4-6 months old, saying consonant-vowel sounds like "ma" or "um," and then strings of syllables like "babababa!"



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Animal sounds bridge babbling and actual words for toddlers. Many animal sounds are easier to say than animal names. For example, "baa" is easier to sound than "sh" in "sheep."

As babies grow into toddlers and preschoolers, activities like games, songs and books with animal sounds help them hear, imitate and play with sounds in spoken language. This skill set, phonological awareness, is critical for learning to read and write.

Language is learned by recognizing, mimicking and attaching meaning to sounds. Social interaction exposes babies and toddlers to spoken language and is one way this development happens.

Animal noises are one of many sounds that help kids develop language skills. Toys, books and conversations about animals put their language skills to work. Language interaction means more exposure and practice for children, so having this shared experience with caregivers, parents and other children is key.

Words assigned to animal sounds vary across languages, because they've been filtered through each language's characteristics and rules. According to linguist Arika Okrent, in Japanese, /kw/ sounds are not found, so ducks don't say "quack," but rather "ga ga." Okrent also points out that animal sounds

use a language's standard features. So, with all the rolling R's of their human counterparts, French pigs say, "groin-groin." All of this suggests that animal sounds in each language are tailored to support speech development in that language.

Animal sounds reflect familiar experiences in culture, too. Derek Abbott of the University of Adelaide in Australia created a fascinating spreadsheet on animal-related utterances in different languages. You'll notice only one moose sound — "bröl" in Swedish — because Sweden is where a child is most likely to spot a moose strolling around.

Children's toys, songs and books often highlight farm animals as stars. Reading farm animal noise books together is an excellent way to support baby and toddler's language learning.

Check out these farm animal noise books to start your journey mooing, quacking and baaiing with your babies and toddlers!

<https://www.readbrightly.com/books/9780679809012/open-the-barn-door-find-a-cow-by-christopher-santorio/>

<https://www.readbrightly.com/books/9780593430569/peek-inside-the-farm-by-becky-davies-illustrated-by-fhiona-galloway/>

<https://www.readbrightly.com/books/9780399256011/the-very-busy-spider-by-eric-carle-illustrated-by-eric-carle/>

<https://www.readbrightly.com/books/9780763675899/can-you-say-it-too-quack-quack-by-illustrated-by-sebastien-braun/>

<https://www.readbrightly.com/books/9780593378724/hello-world-on-the-farm-by-jill-mcdonald/>

Abstracted by Julia Robison-Schultze, a BabyRead volunteer, from "Brightly: Raise Kids Who Love to Read" by Lindsay Barrett, Penguin Random House.

**BABYREAD'S MISSION** is to raise the literacy level in Coonee County by encouraging moms/caregivers to read daily to children from birth. This prepares children for success in school and in life. Readers read with moms/caregivers in person at town or school libraries. We have a COMD option. Questions? Contact Caren von Hippel, Ph.D., president, at [babyread@charter.net](mailto:babyread@charter.net) or (864) 643-8083 or visit [babyread.org](http://babyread.org).

## STEM-themed books for babies and toddlers

It's never too early to expose children to STEM topics, especially as they are learning how their hands work. Those hands might one day create software code, build a robot or create a circuit. Until then, the list of books below will help expose them to the fascinating worlds of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM).

- "Baby Loves Structural Engineering!" by Ruth Spiro, illustrated by Irene Chan



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Architecture is the perfect marriage of engineering and art — a building should be both as beautiful and sturdy as possible. Using toy blocks and comparing them to famous real-world buildings, this clever board book introduces babies and toddlers to architectural structures and construction. Who knows what kind of block towers they'll come up with after

reading?

- "Big Ideas for Little Environmentalists: Restoration with Wangari Maathai" by Maureen McQuerry, illustrated by Robin Rosenthal

Trees are an essential part of the earth's ecosystem. Wangari Maathai saw how Kenya's tree loss affected the environment, animals and people and worked hard to restore her country's tree population. Little children will love this story of one person making a difference through hard work and perseverance. What a great moral to a tragic situation.

- "Robots, Robots, Everywhere!" by Sue Fliess, illustrated by Bob Staake

This Book will satisfy your child's fascination with robots. This book shows babies and toddlers how robots and machines are becoming a part of everyday life. Fun illustrations and rhymes make this a fun read-aloud opportunity for the family.

- "Bathtime Mathtime" by Danica McKellar, illustrated by Alicia Padrón

Former television star and now mathematician Danica McKellar thinks it's never too early to understand math. Bath time becomes a fun learning activity for counting and numbers. Dirty toes, rubber ducks and bubbles are a great way to give your kids a friendly and accessible introduction to all that math has to offer.

- "High Chair Chemistry" by Jill Esbaum and WonderLab Group

Babies and toddlers are naturally curious explorers, so why not nurture their love of learning with an interactive story time? Combining science and play, your toddler will get exposure to basic chemistry concepts with this fun book in the "Big Science for Tiny Tots" series. The tongue-in-cheek humor of the dialogue will entertain caregivers, while messy baby photos will keep your babies and toddlers' attention. Also check out "Bath Time Physics" for that post-meal clean up.

Happy reading with your baby or toddler — who knows, you might learn something too!

*Julia Robison-Schultze abstracted this from Brightly; Raise Kids Who Love to Read, Devon Corneal, 2023*

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## Tipsto keep kids safe when temperatures soar

The National Weather Service says 90 degrees and above temps can pose a risk for children. High temps can cause dehydration, heat exhaustion, cramps, heat stroke and other illnesses. Keep an eye on your children and consult a doctor if any of the following symptoms develop: feeling faint, extreme tiredness, headache, fever, intense thirst, nausea, vomiting, muscle spasms or aches, breathing faster than usual, not urinating for many hours.



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### PLAYING IT COOL IN EXTREME HEAT.

Stay inside and play games or make crafts if you do not have access to a swimming pool or other water locations.

### YOU DON'T HAVE AIR CONDITIONING?

Making a trip to the library or super market can be a great place to retreat from the heat if you don't have air conditioning. Power outages or inconsistent working air conditioning can create unsafe situations. If your town offers cooling centers in gyms or other locations, spend time there to retreat from the heat.

### WHAT ABOUT FANS?

Close window blinds and curtains to keep out the sun and heat. If you have a fan, use it, but keep it in a safe location away from children. Fans should not be used in extreme heat (high 90s and up) because they don't cool the air and may cause the body temp to increase to an unsafe level.

### TIPS TO BEAT THE HEAT IF YOU ARE OUTSIDE

**Stay hydrated:** It is very important for children to drink plenty of water so always have it available. Water bottles or canisters should accompany you whenever outside. Infants under 6 months should not be given water if they are breast feeding.

**Dress lightly:** Clothes should be loose fitting with plenty of ventilation and light colored. Light single layers can help maximize the evaporation of sweat, especially if the material is designed to absorb sweat and has a cooling effect. Sunscreen is a must.

**Plan for extra rest time:** Heat can be draining on both children and parents. Irritability can set in so take regular breaks and step inside for relief.

**Cool off with water:** Cool off with a mist spray to keep children from overheating. A simple spray bottle filled with cold water is a great way to cool down. Or wrap ice in a towel for a quick cool down.

**And never leave your child alone in a car:** In a very short time, the car can become an oven and create a dangerous situation for a child, even with the windows down.

Julia Robison-Schultze, a BabyRead volunteer, abstracted this article from American Academy of Pediatrics Council on Children and Disasters (Copyright © 2021) Updated 7/06/2023

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## The surprising power of family meals

If your family is currently not eating together, set the goal of one meal per week. If they are already doing it, suggest that they do so with more verve and intention. Educate yourself on the overwhelming benefits of the family meal for children and parents alike. Practice it in your own home so that you, too, may know the magic of



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this simple act. Family meals are a small change that is accessible and manageable for just about anyone.

In Miriam Weinstein's book, "The Surprising Power of Family Meals," I was reminded of how important this "ritual" truly is. Family meals have been associated with a lower incidence of teenage drug and alcohol use, lower teen pregnancy rates and

decreased risk for both obesity and eating disorders. At the same time, they are also tied to getting better grades, better reading readiness in kindergartners and increased resilience in kids. Surprising, huh?

It seems that family meals help kids learn what constitutes a "reasonable" meal in terms of nutrition and portion size. But, overwhelmingly, the benefits of the family meal come from the almost ridiculously simple act of just sitting together, sharing the same food and facing each other.

Relationships become enriched by reflecting on the day's activities, accomplishments and what is coming up for tomorrow. Delving in and talking, sharing stories, creating opportunities for further bonding. Most times, it's not about the food but more about the time together. What else could your family do together on a regular basis? Cleaning the house? Making dinner?

Mealtimes are a great opportunity to support STEM learning, as one example. You can talk about STEM ideas and use STEM words as you feed or talk with your child as they start trying solid foods (right around 6 months).

Children can learn about quantity ("One more bite!"), volume ("This cup has more milk."), sequencing ("First eat the banana, then a Cheerio."), physical properties ("It is too hot. My ice cream is melting!") and plants ("Carrots grow in the ground, but apples grow on trees.")

Children learn new things when they practice them in everyday routines. Try one or two of the following activities during mealtimes. With a little bit of practice, mealtime can become a natural place to talk and learn about STEM. Use these ideas to set up the environment and materials to best suit your child's needs.

Kristin Saxena, Board Certified Pediatrician, "The Surprising Power of Family Meals" September 2, 2021, BabyTalk from Camille Catlett

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## *Screen time linked with developmental delays in toddlerhood*

A study published in the journal JAMA Pediatrics found that a child handling a smartphone or tablet from one to four hours of screen time is linked to developmental delays starting from age 1. Delays include communication, fine motor, problem-solving and personal and social skills by age 2.



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Four or more hours with screens significantly increased delays: 4.78 times more likely to have underdeveloped communication skills, 1.74 times more likely to have impaired fine motor skills and 2 times more likely to have underdeveloped personal and social skills.

“It’s a really important study because it has a very large sample size of children who’ve been followed for several years,” said Dr. Jason Nagata, associate professor of pediatrics at the University of California, San Francisco, who wasn’t involved in the study. “The study fills an important gap because it identifies specific developmental delays (in skills) such as communication and problem-solving associated with screen time,” said Nagata, noting there haven’t been many prior studies that studied this issue with several years of follow-up data.

### **HOW SCREEN TIME CAN AFFECT DEVELOPMENT**

The potential harms of screen time on communication skills may have to do with children being robbed of drivers for language development, Dr. John Hutton, associate professor of general and community pediatrics at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center said.

“Kids learn how to talk if they’re encouraged to talk, and very often, if they’re just watching a screen, they’re not having an opportunity to practice talking,” he said. “They may hear a lot of words, but they’re not practicing saying a lot of words or having a lot of that back-and-forth interaction.”

Social skills cannot be nurtured when technology gets in the way.

“Also, (with) passive screen viewing that doesn’t have an interactive or physical component, children are more likely to be sedentary and then aren’t able to practice motor skills,” Nagata said.

### **HEALTHIER WAYS TO OCCUPY CHILDREN**

If you need to rely on screens sometimes, opt for educational content or video chats with a loved one so they can still get some social interaction, Nagata said.

Quality of screen time, not quantity, is recommended by The American Academy of Pediatrics, and they do have resources for determining guidelines and limits for your family — such as its family media plan you can tailor to your own family’s needs.

It’s best to lead by example and limit your own screen time, and for children, turn devices off when not in use. Set a schedule if needed.

Julia Robison-Schultze, a BabyRead volunteer, abstracted this from an article written by Kristen Rogers, CNN, Updated Aug. 21, 2023.

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## Get face-to-face with your infant for language development

Within the first 3 years of life, infants become masters of the language their community speaks. Their impressive language development skills can be tied to: a. attentional biases that make infants tune into social and linguistic signals, and b. their brains are equipped with pattern recognition skills to help learn specific sounds and structures from speech heard.

“Baby talk” helps young children attend to and process speech. Modified adult speech patterns like raising voice pitch, exaggerating different sounds, and making speech more repetitive and rhythmic all help infants language development.



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Non-verbal cues like positive and caring facial expressions, head nods and eyebrow movements coordinated with the pauses and pitch changes in their speech provide multisensory cues to aid in language learning.

During the first six months, infants mostly focus on the eyes of the speaker. This gives infants information about the emotions and intentions of people. In months 6-12, the focus for infants becomes specific patterns they hear and become increasingly engaged in

babbling, first by combining single vowel and consonant sounds (e.g., ba) and then stringing the sounds together (e.g., dadadada). By focusing their visual attention on the mouth from the eyes, the infant receives redundant and complementary auditory and visual information about the speech they are hearing.

In previous studies, singing to infants showed a greater and earlier focus on moving from looking at the eyes to the mouth. Infants look at the mouth of someone engaging them more for song than speech.

What about songs that make the mouths of singers so interesting for babies? Slower singing retention than spoken retention, greater movement of the mouth leading to greater synchrony between mouth movements and voice and smiling more when singing all promote infants' attention to the mouth. This is particularly meaningful during the latter half of the first year when infants are babbling and learning to say their first words because it highlights the mouth movements that are used as part of producing speech.

What to do? Engage with your baby by speaking and singing to them face-to-face every day. These face-to-face interactions give babies visual cues to support their attention. Look in the mirror together so that your baby sees how your facial expressions change between singing and speaking. Sing songs like “If You’re Happy and You Know It” using the lyrics to act out different emotions as you sing, making your face very expressive to your baby.

No time is too early to start talking and singing to your baby.

• Julia Robison-Schultze, a BabyRead volunteer, abstracted this from an article Co-authored by Camila Alviar, Ph.D. and Miriam Lense, Ph.D.

As you consider an end-of-year philanthropic gift, I hope you will consider giving the gift of READING to a baby or toddler by donating to BabyRead. Your contribution can provide young children in our community with books, children’s periodicals, and educational toys. It can enable us to continue the reading incentive program which provides BabyRead families with an Aldi gift card as a reward for reading to their little one 20 times in a month. You can help prepare a child to be successful when they enter school.

AND, last but not least ... As you consider your year-end donation, please remember that BabyRead is an IRS qualified charity. If you are at least 70½ years of age, you can make a qualified charitable distribution directly from your IRA to BabyRead. This can count toward your Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) without being considered taxable income for you. If you choose to use this approach, your IRA administrator can manage the process. Please also notify our treasurer, Bill Walker, by email at [bill4pub@charter.net](mailto:bill4pub@charter.net).

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