

Library Lines by Ruth Gilbert, Youth Services Librarian

With the arrival of warmer weather comes the return of storytime at the Kirkland Town Library! We're still not holding programs indoors but we have a big patch of green grass in front of the building where we can hold outdoor storytimes. I've been so happy to be able to welcome babies and toddlers and their caregivers back to the library, and to meet new babies who arrived during the past year. Being able to attend a storytime can be a luxury, so if you can't make it to one, you can do similar activities with your baby at home.

The library has lots of items you can borrow to use with your baby or toddler. One of our newest offerings is our Play With Me kits. These kits provide age-appropriate toys that encourage exploration and imaginative play, and we have them for ages 0-12 months, 12-24 months, 24-36 months, and 36-48 months. The kits are great for parents wanting to try something new, to bring to visit grandparents who might not have toys around, or for babysitters looking for fun ways to play.

We also have Storytime-to-Go bags, which provide everything you need to have a storytime at home. Each bag has a theme and includes books that are perfect for reading aloud, suggested songs and activities, and a related toy.

And of course, the library has books for your babies and toddlers. It is never too early to share books with a baby, but choosing those books can feel overwhelming. You may be thinking, "Is my infant really looking at this book? Does she understand the words I'm reading?" Your baby may not be looking at the book and may not understand the words, but she loves the sound of your voice and the way you hold her close while you're reading, and you're practicing something that will become a wonderful habit by the time she's a little bigger.

It can help to choose books that are easier for babies to look at, with bright, bold, simple pictures or high contrast images for very young infants. As babies get older they'll enjoy looking at more detailed pictures. Board books are easier for babies to hold and turn pages, and they can stand up to a good chewing. Interactive books with flaps and moveable parts are also really engaging for babies. Treat board books as toys - have them around with your baby's other play things and they'll even start to look at them on their own.

Books with repetitive text are great for babies and toddlers because they learn to know what's coming in the book, which gives them a sense of security. (Ever wonder why kids love to read the same books over and over?) So look for books with lines that repeat.

I love Tana Hoban's book "Black & White" for very young babies, but any book with black and white pictures can work. For older babies and younger toddlers I recommend "Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?" by Bill Martin Jr. and Eric Carle, "The Very Hungry Caterpillar," by Eric Carle, and "Where's Spot?" by Eric Hill. They all have repetition, bold illustrations, and interactive or tactile elements.

Reading with your baby or toddler should be relaxing and fun, so if they're not in the mood, don't force it. It's ok! You can try again later. You can also try reading a book out loud while an active toddler is playing. They may be listening even if it seems like they're not paying attention. In the end, what matters is that babies and toddlers have access to books and that they see reading as fun.

And don't forget that the library staff is also a resource here to help you. If you need help choosing books for your young child, or want to know how to learn more songs to sing

with them, or what other activities you could try, reach out to us here at the Kirkland Town Library or your own local library. We're here to help!