

SELECTING BOOKS FOR YOUR PROGRAM

BOOKS BUILD
CONNECTIONS
TOOLKIT



Pediatric professionals in the medical home play a vital role in promoting reading to children and their parents. Selecting books that are developmentally, culturally, and thematically appropriate, as well as affordable, can be a challenge. To simplify this important task, this document provides some things to consider when selecting books for your program.

“Giving out a book has become one of the most important, tangible, and joyous parts of my daily routine as a pediatrician. Nothing can compare to how much fun it is to watch a child’s face light up when you hand them a book. It’s cute to see the child immediately ask the parent to read to them. It’s pure satisfaction to see that same child later reading their new book themselves. That’s because you can tell that the parents really take what you encourage to heart and go home and read to their kids. As Xochi, a 5-year-old girl in my practice said, ‘Books can take me to faraway places.’ Books are fun for anyone who is involved—the kids, parents, nurses, volunteers, and even ... us doctors!”—Ingrid Martinez-Andree, MD

Books, especially for children, are meant to encourage a joy in reading, which in turn will lead to a proficiency in a vital educational skill. Sometimes that joy, for an individual child, will be found in a classic children’s book and at other times in an inexpensive book featuring a popular cartoon character. In either case, the important thing is that a child is reading or sharing a book with a beloved adult. It is that experience that is the true measure of quality.

When looking for books, look for visual appeal, content, and message. Books should also have interesting language and illustrations that are attractive and colorful. Books with a humorous tone often become favorites.

An additional publication in this American Academy of Pediatrics series (*Finding the Right*

Book for Every Child) provides examples of a few books by developmental ages and some common topics to help you begin finding appropriate books. Review these additional guidelines for further tips.

Developmental Guidelines by Age Group

The developmental stage of the child should determine the type and length of the books he is given. As children grow up and their attention span increases, they like longer stories. At each developmental stage, the following characteristics for books are relevant:

Infants

- Photographs and images of other babies and familiar objects (eg, balls, bottles): Pointing and naming images for infants help language development.
- Strong contrasts and brightly colored designs.
- Durable books: Board books have pages that are heavy, sturdy, and laminated. Infants and toddlers can chew on these books without damaging them. They are perfect for little hands. Board books have designs that are bright, pictures that are simple and clear, and stories that are short. Cloth books have pages made out of heavy-duty cloth. The pages are not as easily turned as those in board books, but they are durable.

Toddlers

- Photos and images (eg, animals sleeping or playing).
- Topics (eg, going to sleep for bedtime, saying hello and good-bye, recognizing animals).
- Engaging and rich text: To encourage learning new vocabulary, good choices for the youngest readers include books with only a few words per page.
- Repetitive phrases, simple rhymes, predictable text, or questions: Books that involve the reader are ideal.
- Sturdy board books: By age 2½ most children have learned to handle paperback or hardcover books well, but board books are still a good idea for toddlers with their new found mobility.

Preschoolers

- Topics (eg, going to school or the doctor, having brothers and sisters, making friends): Children enjoy books about others their own age who have similar, familiar experiences and books that open new worlds up to them.
- Paperback books with longer stories: Children can be asked to guess what will happen next in the story.
- Books that have simple texts they can memorize.

Early Readers—Grades 1–3

Learning to read is a difficult task. Children entering school still enjoy being read to using books with complex language, but they also need books with simple, but engaging, language that they can master. Books like *Nate the Great* or *Hop on Pop* are good choices for early readers.

Chapter Books—Grades 3–5

Chapter books offer longer stories for children. There are books on almost any subject, fiction or nonfiction, for any reader. Children should help choose their own books. Series are popular with children in these grades, and adults should understand the value in these books. Reading, above all, should be pleasurable.

Grades 6 and Up

Young adult novels range from the light stories like *The Princess Diaries* to powerful fiction such as *Letters from the Inside*. A goldmine of books for teenagers is available to compete with many other distractions like television or computers for their leisure time.

Having a doctor suggest a book can encourage a teenager to rediscover the joy of reading. Books should be selected with both parents and children in mind. Books must be interesting and appealing to both for family reading time to be enjoyable.

Cultural Appropriateness

Books need to be carefully evaluated for the messages they give to children, especially as they relate to racism or sexism. Examine books for the following elements:

Illustrations

- Are characters stereotypically drawn?
- Do people of color have Caucasian features except for tinted skin?
- Do the illustrations depict cultures, abilities, genders, and families in positive ways?

Story Lines

- Are people of color or girls in subservient roles?
- Are cultural beliefs and practices portrayed accurately?
- Are negative judgments implied in depicting diverse lifestyles?
- Does the text depict cultures, abilities, genders, and families in positive ways?

Characters

- Are girls and people of color represented equally in all character roles?
- How are individual characters presented?
- Who has the power?
- Who are the heroes?
- Who are the villains?

Self-Image

- What messages, overt or covert, are children receiving from the story?
- How does the story support or undermine a child's self-esteem?

Variety

It is important to have a variety of books available to account for children's different interests. Children like characters, situations, and topics to which they can relate; they also enjoy learning about new things. Stories can be fictional or nonfictional. Books can be about people, animals, imaginary characters, the environment, folktales, sports, or nursery rhymes.

Cost

Many high quality, sturdy children's board books and most paperback children's books range in cost from \$2 to \$3 wholesale per book. Hardcover books, while more durable than paperbacks, usually cost between \$5 and \$7 per book at wholesale rates. Most paperback children's books range in cost from \$2 to \$3 wholesale per book. Hardcover books usually are more durable and cost between \$5 and \$7 per book based on wholesale rates. Discounts often are available when books are ordered in bulk, and pediatric early literacy programs may qualify for publisher discounts.

Reach Out and Read programs have access to a specially discounted book ordering system.

Book vendors often offer discounts to non-Reach Out and Read pediatric literacy efforts. Contact books@reachoutandread.org for more information on vendors that can provide low-cost books to interested medical practices.

First Book is another organization that distributes low-cost children's books to literacy-promoting programs and prioritizes programs that serve disadvantaged children.

Adapted from the AAP Literacy Promotion Technical Assistance Toolkit (1999), and the AAP Literacy Promotion Toolkit Web site (2008), Diane DerMarderosian, MD, FAAP, Pamela C High, MD, FAAP, Jackie Miller, and the AAP Council on Early Childhood, 2014

Other pediatric professional ePubs in this AAP series include the following:

- Evidence Supporting Early Literacy and Early Learning
- Finding the Right Book for Every Child
- What Every Pediatric Professional Can Do to Promote Early Literacy and Early Learning

Family resources related to early literacy and early learning include the following:

- Helping Your Child Learn to Read
- Sharing Books With Your Baby up to Age 11 Months
- Sharing Books With Your 1-Year-Old
- Sharing Books With Your 2-Year-Old
- Sharing Books With Your Preschooler
- Sharing Books With Your School-Age Child
- The Secret to a Smarter Baby
- Why It Is Never Too Early to Start Reading With Your Baby

Please visit aap.org/literacy for further information about resources mentioned within this publication and additional resources on early literacy.

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