The first year with a baby is a close, sharing time, and reading with an infant is an important activity. Infants enjoy being held and hearing the sound of your voice. Even the youngest infant benefits from sharing books with a special adult. Baby will begin to associate books and stories with positive feelings. These sharing experiences will build a good foundation for learning book skills – looking, focusing, giving attention, and recognizing symbols. A baby may not understand the words you say, but he will enjoy the sounds and rhythms of language. By sharing books and reading, you are helping an infant become familiar with the patterns of language.

Tips for selecting books for babies

- Select books with short, simple texts that feature a lot of rhyme and rhythm. A baby will hear the patterns and sounds of the language more than individual words.

- A baby is a visual learner. Choose books with bright colors and sharp contrasting patterns. Books with large, clear illustrations are good for visual discrimination. Interesting patterns are great for visual stimulation.

- Add variety, and select books with bright, realistic illustrations. An infant will enjoy looking at the pictures even if he doesn’t understand that they are symbols for real objects.

- A baby likes pictures that are actual photos. He really delights in looking at faces of people – especially other babies!

- For older infants who are beginning to understand some words, choose simple wordless books. Or offer books with pictures of familiar objects on an uncluttered background labeled with only one or two words. Be sure to point to the words as you read or say the names of the objects.

- Reading is also a sensory experience for babies, so select some books that have textures to explore.

- By the middle of the first year, a baby may be able to grasp and hold a book. Choose books that are easy to hold and manipulate such as soft, washable vinyl books or machine-wash-and-dry cloth books. These books are also very easy to clean. That’s important because as a baby holds a book, she may also want to put it into her mouth.
• Select books that picture things that are common to infants’ everyday lives – people, neighborhood animals, clothing, foods, dishes, toys, cars.

• Choose books that are primarily “picture” books. Story lines are not the focus of sharing books with babies. It is all about the illustrations and language sounds.

• Choose books that picture diverse people in non-stereotypical roles and situations.

• Choose books that are books and teethers that are teethers. Avoid novelty books that encourage chewing on books.