

Overview of Toddler Story Time

Story time is more than picking a stack of books to read. Early literacy and learning is also encouraged through songs, rhymes, dancing, musical instruments, and other activities. Here is a sample story time lineup, developmentally appropriate to a toddler audience, ages 1 to 3.

<i>Welcome</i>	Welcome the group, introduce yourself, give any announcements or expectations as briefly as possible.
<i>Opening Song</i>	I use the same opening song every time to welcome everyone, and signal to kids that it's time to settle down and listen. This kind of structure is important to toddlers.
<i>Book 1</i>	While you have their attention, launch into a book right away. Pick the longer of your two books
<i>Flannel Board</i>	Flannel boards are an excellent way to present songs or rhymes in a unique visual way, distinct from books. Plus the way fabric sticks to the board is like "magic."
<i>Action Song</i>	It's definitely time by now to stand up and get moving with a song you sing yourself, or one on CD.
<i>Book 2</i>	After wiggling around, a second short book works well. Toddlers stay more focused if you ask them to participate in the story with animal sounds, noticing colors, counting, etc. even if it's the caregivers who are mostly responding.
<i>Egg Shaker Song</i>	Now it's time for some serious moving around. I like egg shakers because they are educational, freeform and give kids 2-4 minutes to shake, dance, sit, whatever they like.
<i>Quiet Song</i>	Settle everyone back down with a short, familiar song. I use Twinkle Twinkle Little Star.
<i>Free Spot</i>	This is a nice time to do another flannel board, or show the children an interesting prop. Perhaps you have another song, a rhyme, a poem to put here.
<i>Song</i>	This can be an action song, or a sitting song, so long as it invites the children to participate
<i>Closing Song</i>	End with the same song each week. This helps signal to toddlers that story time is over.

***This is just a sample!! Rearrange to suit you and your group. ***

Key Developmental Aspects of a Toddler, ages 1-3.

- Responds well to familiar stories about actions or events they recognize like going to the grocery store, playing, eating.
- Does not yet distinguish between “real” and “make believe.”
- Vision is still improving. Large, simple illustrations are still easier to decode especially from a distance.
- Can imitate spoken words and identify familiar objects and people.
- Can make connection between illustrations/symbols, and the actual object.
- Responsive to emotions and expressions. Be cautious with negative, scary or worried expressions.
- By 16-24 months, average children are speaking with a vocabulary of 200 words and this rapidly increases from here. They understand even more words.
- By age 2-3 a child understands physical relationships like over, under, above, below, etc.
- Gross motor skills are developing like balance and coordination. They are learning to complete simple puzzles.
- Toddlers do not yet understand cause and effect like why they shouldn't run out in the street, or the need to modulate their voice.
- The toddler brain is making hundreds of connections, and pruning other synapses. As a result attentions spans are quite short, however, toddlers are paying excellent attention even when they appear quite distracted.

Tips for Toddler Story Time

- Set up your expectations for caregivers at the beginning. These might include having caregivers follow along, and that it's ok to leave with your child and come back (sample story time) in the middle of the program.
- Keep reading and singing even when some kids are talking or moving around, this is their developmental way of “paying attention”. If you can't hear yourself read though, it's time to try something else.
- It's ok to stop story time and ask for caregiver attention either for a specific child being disruptive, or if parents themselves are being disruptive.
- Be flexible, change up your order if need be.
- Have some simple, active songs memorized to bring out when the group needs to move (If You're Happy and You Know It, or Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes).
- Have some quiet songs memorized to bring out when the group needs settling down. Twinkle Twinkle Little Star sung through twice usually does the trick.
- Don't feel you have to finish a book. Laugh and say “That's enough of that book for now, let's try something else.”
- Don't worry if kids don't follow along with your motions. They are still learning.
- Stick with a familiar structure week to week.
- Repetition, repetition, repetition. Toddlers need to hear things slowly and more than once – they are learning. Sing songs up to 3 times through.