

Rhyme Time

Babies love rhymes. Before birth, babies hear the rhythmic beat of their mother's heart. Shortly after birth they are conscious of different rhythms, including their own sucking rhythms as well as breathing and rocking. They seem ready to tune into rhythms of speech - in fact, babies seem to pay more attention to rhymes and be more responsive to them than to normal speech.

Why rhymes are so good for babies and toddlers

Your baby has your undivided attention and your face is close, so they can more easily 'read' and later imitate the sounds

- Your speech is softer, slower and higher-pitched than normal speech, which makes understanding easier and reflects your love for your child
- Most rhymes include some physical interaction, which adds fun and surprise and gives opportunities for smiles and laughter
- Your child will learn about turn-taking, listening and joining in - all essential skills for communicating
- Your child will become familiar with repeated rhymes and will take comfort from them
- Singing or reciting rhymes with your child helps them to recognise words and sounds

And rhymes are also good for adults!

- Some adults find it difficult to talk to babies. Using a rhyme can be an effective way of starting communication and sustaining interaction, as the baby is likely to respond enthusiastically and want more
- Rhymes provide ideal one-to-one bonding situations
- Rhymes can soothe your baby
- No equipment is needed

Time for rhymes

- Make sure your baby is 'in the mood' before you begin. Your baby or toddler should be looking at you.
- Introduce and accompany the rhymes with a running commentary, such as "Listen to me. Time to stop now. Well done."
- Give lots of praise when your child joins in. Children like an audience!
- Add fun by the way you use your voice. Pause to add suspense.
- Begin with familiar rhymes, which comfort your child, and work towards new ones.

All text © National Literacy Trust 2017

T: 020 7587 1842 W: www.literacytrust.org.uk Twitter: @Literacy_Trust Facebook: nationalliteracytrust

- Turn off the TV and radio so your voice can be clearly heard.
- Personalise rhymes by adding your child's name where possible.
- Make it fun! The more engaged your child is, the more likely it is that he will acquire words.

Recommended nursery rhymes

Birth to 2 years of age

- This little piggy
- Hush a bye baby
- One-two buckle my shoe
- Pat-a-cake
- What can the matter be?

2 to 3 years of age

- Old McDonald
- London Bridge
- Eency weency spider
- Here we go round the mulberry bush
- The wheels on the bus
- Row, row, row your boat

Useful resources

There are lots of words to rhymes and songs to download for free:

<http://www.wordsforlife.org.uk/songs>

<http://www.scottishbooktrust.com/bookbug/bookbug-resources/song-rhyme-ideas>

YouTube and apps are another useful source if you can't remember the tunes!

Originally created for Talk to Your baby drawing on "Rhyme Time", written by Opal Dunn for *Nursery World*, 6 May 2004. Updated in 2017.