

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 increases word acquisition

But rhymes are also good for adults!

- Some adults find it difficult to talk to babies. Saying 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

Presentation

- 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 the new
- 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

- Playsongs - a book of 70 songs and rhymes, traditional and new, with useful advice and a well performed CD (Playsongs Publications, £12.99, Tel: 01799 599 054, email: info@playsongs.co.uk)
- Peers Early Education Partnership publishes a range of song books and tapes for babies up to preschool. Tel: 01865779779, email: info@peep.org.uk or visit www.peep.org.uk
- Chanting Rhymes by John Foster and Carol Thompson (Oxford University Press, £4.99) is one of a series of rhyme books for young children. The series has well chosen rhymes and attractive illustrations, which are invaluable for shared reading and singing.

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