



Study: Parents, toddlers interact more when reading print books vs. e-books

by Melissa Jenco, News Content Editor

Electronic books are convenient, but they may not be as beneficial for toddlers' development as print books, according to a small study.

Researchers from the University of Michigan C.S. Mott Children's Hospital found parents and toddlers interacted more when reading print books together.

"Shared reading promotes children's language development, literacy and bonding with parents," lead author Tiffany Munzer, M.D., said in a news release. "... We found that when parents and children read print books, they talked more frequently and the quality of their interactions were better."

The team studied 37 pairs of parents and their 2- or 3-year-olds in a lab set up to look like a living room. Each pair read three Little Critter books by Mercer Mayer with a different format - print, basic electronic or enhanced electronic, which had features like sound effects.

Parents were more likely to ask their children open-ended questions to get their opinion on the story or what might happen next when reading print books compared to both basic and enhanced e-books. They also put stories into context, relating the material to the child's own experiences. With electronic books, they spent time talking about the device itself, distracting from the story, according to the study "Differences in Parent-Toddler Interactions with Electronic Versus Print Books" (Munzer TG, et al. *Pediatrics*. March 25, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2018-2012>).

Toddlers also talked more in general and about the stories when they were in print, perhaps due in part to their parents' prompting.

Researchers said the tablets used to read electronic books may have been seen as "individually used, rather than shared objects," and toddlers may have been distracted by tapping and swiping. They noted children were missing out on beneficial interactions when they read e-books.

"Parents strengthen their children's ability to acquire knowledge by relating new content to their children's lived experiences," Dr. Munzer said. "Research tells us that parent-led conversations (are) especially important for toddlers because they learn and retain new information better from in-person interactions than from digital media."

Authors suggested pediatricians recommend print books to families and that parents who choose e-books try to engage in the same way they would with print books.

That recommendation was echoed by authors of a [related commentary](#) who praised the study for being able to compare experiences within each parent-toddler pair and called for more research on electronic books.

"In the meantime, pediatricians should help parents understand that enhancements often found in electronic books will not help child development as much as enhancements provided by parental interaction," they wrote.

Resources

- [AAP literacy toolkit](#)



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- [Reach Out and Read](#)
- [Information for parents from HealthyChildren.org on reading with 2- and 3-year-olds](#)