

The importance of early library use

Posted by [Alan Van Wormer](#) On 05/27/2018

PRINCE FREDERICK, Md. - A baby forms 700 new neural connections per second in the first years of life according to Dr. Jack Shonkoff, director of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. Dr. Shonkoff said, "This process of building the architecture of the brain is dramatically influenced by life experiences. It is not genetically hardwired. Literally our environment shapes the architecture of our brain in the first year of life." In recognition of this and in support of the goal to prepare children for Kindergarten, Calvert Library will make all children's picture books fine-free beginning June 4.

Exposure to rich learning experiences in those first years is critical. Calvert Library is an excellent source for these. To bring that idea forward in new parents' minds, Calvert Library, Calvert Library Foundation, Friends of Calvert Library, Optimist Club of Calvert and PNC Bank partnered to give every baby born at Calvert Health a board book, a cloth bag and information about the importance of reading, playing, talking, singing and writing with your baby starting at birth. Calvert Library Director Carrie Plymire said, "The research tells us that the positive impact of quality and quantity shared book-reading with infants is still obvious years later when they start school. Reading is enriched by the interactivity of the reading...taking on the emotions of the characters, responding to your babies' emotions, labeling pictures, choosing developmentally-appropriate books. Our amazing librarians help with all that."

Calvert Library offers twenty-six (26) Storytimes a week. "Storytime" is Calvert Library's welcoming word for early learning classes. Babies and children up to school age gain language and early literacy skills, phonological awareness, narrative skills, letter knowledge and listening skills. Themes and activities are chosen to introduce age-appropriate literature, math, science and social studies concepts through books, interactive activities, calendars, felt boards, fingerplays, music and art. Through Storytime classes, children learn to associate books with a fun, social activity instilling a love of reading and learning.

Parents are a child's first and best teacher and in Storytime, parents can learn great tips for building their babies' brains and bright future. Talking to your baby about what you are doing increases the number of words he/she is exposed to. Read out loud what you are reading for yourself to expose your baby to more vocabulary. Using your finger to track your reading teaches your child how text runs left to right. Encourage language development by using simple signs and speaking at the same time. Babies' brains aren't developed enough until 18-24 months to make use of any content on a screen and, in fact, there is evidence that it has a negative impact on language development, short term memory and reading skills. Singing, talking and playing with your baby, making eye contact and showing your positive emotions builds critical interaction skills and a sense of safety which is what baby brains are primed to learn at this stage. Every week in storytime there are simple techniques presented that parents can use at home.

Participation in Storytime also makes it easy to complete 500 by Five, a library initiative to read 500 books by five years old. It is excellent bonding time for children and their caregiver, which plays an important role in a child's future happiness and success.

Storytime offers an opportunity for adults to bond with others who are in similar life stages. We know storytime parents who still get together on a regular basis even though their children are now in college!

Baby brain building activities don't stop with Storytime at the library. Much of what librarians teach their young customers in Storytime, are also part of the experiences in other library classes and opportunities. They offer weekly Monday Morning Fun, Shake It Out Music and Movement, and of course, books, music and more. The Calvert Library Foundation has also funded Imagination Stations at each branch with learning toys and a wide variety of manipulatives to provide learning opportunities at different developmental stages and to develop imaginative play skills. Youth Coordinator Beverly Allyn Izzi describes the importance of play for childhood development, "Play is how children learn. Hands-on, imaginative play is the best way for children to understand the world around them. They develop creative thinking and problem-solving skills and more importantly, they engage their imagination in ways that structured play cannot." There are opportunities to learn sorting, recognize colors and letters, practice counting and weighing, learn vocabulary, develop motor skills, all the while strengthening their relationship with the caregiver they are playing with. All these resources for free and accessible 61 hours a week at Calvert Library locations.

Even when the library is closed, parents can check out online resources like Tumblebooks, a terrific collection of children's ebooks with interactive activities aimed at children ages two and up. Follow the library on Facebook for periodic early learning tips.

For more information, call Robyn Truslow at 410-535-0291.