

How to Encourage Reading in the First Years of Life

Science-based strategies to create a love for books from infancy

por [Fernanda Lucio](#) | Pitanga Kids

What science proves

A study published in *Pediatrics* — one of the world's most important journals on child development, edited by the American Academy of Pediatrics — evaluated a Brazilian reading program with low-income families. Results surprised the researchers themselves: beyond expected vocabulary gains, children showed significant IQ improvements and better parent-child relationship quality (Instituto Alfa e Beto & NYU, 2023).

The American National Library of Medicine confirms that reading aloud from early infancy stimulates brain areas responsible for language, memory and attention. The Maria Cecilia Souto Vidigal Foundation (2025) states that children with daily mediated reading show significant advances in cognitive and socioemotional development. The science is clear: reading together is one of the most powerful investments you can make for your child.

Why to start earlier than you think

Experts recommend starting reading during pregnancy. The mother's voice, read aloud, is recognized by the baby in the womb — creating the first positive associations with language and maternal presence (Coala Saude, 2022). From birth, even without understanding words, the baby absorbs the rhythm, melody and emotion of the voice — what Vygotsky would call the first "text" the child processes.

Brazil's National Common Curricular Base (BNCC) already establishes, in early childhood education, the importance of experiences with different literary genres as a way to expand cultural and linguistic repertoires from the very first years.

Strategies for 0 to 2 years — sensory and affection

At this stage, the goal is not to teach — it is to create positive associations between book, voice and embrace. Bath books, cloth books and textured books stimulate the senses while introducing the idea that books are objects of pleasure. Repeat the same book as many times as requested: repetition is not boredom — it is how the infant brain consolidates neural connections.

Use exaggerated intonations, change voice for each character, use dramatic pauses. The baby responds to rhythm and enthusiasm long before understanding words. And each reading session is also a bonding session — which, according to Bowlby (1969), is the secure base of all future development.

Strategies for 2 to 5 years — imagination and participation

At this stage, shared reading is one of the most powerful cognitive development practices, according to Vygotsky. The adult who reads together, asks questions and expands the story is operating in the Zone of Proximal Development — the most fertile space for learning.

Ask open questions during reading: "What do you think will happen?" Let the child "read" the pictures, invent alternative endings, identify characters' emotions. Books with characters living real emotions — like fear, jealousy, joy — offer a safe space to name and process their own feelings. The Tulipa Collection was created exactly for this: Nico and Stella live experiences that children recognize and feel.

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"Children are the color and light of our lives"*

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Strategies for 6 to 12 years — independence and identity

Children who had regular reading contact in their early years arrive at literacy with vocabulary up to 3 times larger — and with independent reading as something natural, not an obligation. From age 6, the adult's role shifts: from reader to conversation partner.

Discussing what the child read, asking open questions and showing genuine interest in their chosen book are practices that keep the love of reading alive. Respect the child's preferred genre — the most important thing is that they keep reading. One day they will choose a book that will change their life. Your role is to ensure that day arrives.

Creating the ritual that lasts forever

The secret is not to read a lot — it is to read consistently and with love. Choose a fixed time: bedtime works because it aligns with the need to slow body and mind. Create a comfortable corner with cushions and good light. Let the child choose the book — autonomy in choosing increases engagement and sense of ownership.

You don't need to be a perfect reader. Your voice, with all its imperfections, is the most beautiful in the world to your child. Reading together is an act of love — and love, as all research confirms, is the foundation of all learning.

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