Snuggling up with a child and a favorite book is a powerful way of learning language, even from a very young age, said a specialist in speech and language development at Utah State University’s Center for Persons with Disabilities. “Books are a really lovely way of teaching language,” said Vicki Simonsmeier, one of the coordinators of the Autism Spectrum Disorder Evaluation Clinic and assistant clinical professor in USU’s Communication Disorders and Deaf Education department. Even parents who think they can’t read that same book one more time should persevere. As the child becomes more familiar with the story, he can start to predict what will happen next, or even complete a sentence. Cognitive development, socialization and language all develop through play, said Simonsmeier. A mom who holds a toy close to her face encourages her child to make eye contact and reach for the toy. “It’s their work they have to do every day,” she said.

Working parents, however, find it’s sometimes hard to squeeze in a little one-on-one reading or play time, but Simonsmeier said even five to 10 minutes of reading is beneficial. “Ten minutes a day can be really powerful,” she said. Simonsmeier suggested keeping the house filled with literacy tools like newspapers, letter-shaped fridge magnets, and paper and crayons all allow children to explore pre-academic activities. “We want children to color outside the lines!” she said. Sometimes, though, a child might not seem to be developing as well as she should, no matter how many bedtime stories are read. “The first thing parents should do is trust their instincts,” Simonsmeier said. Parents usually are concerned for a long time before they seek help, she said. “If parents feel their skills are not coming along, if they do have a concern, they should have the child evaluated,” she said. The CPD’s Up to 3 Program offers free evaluations for children from birth to age three, and can help parents find services if needed.

Curious about developmental milestones? Here’s what a baby should be doing at age 2 months: (courtesy of Centers for Disease Control)

**Social/emotional/language/communication**
- Can briefly calm himself
- Smiles at people
- Attempts to look at parent
- Coos, makes gurgling sounds
- Turns head toward sounds

**Cognitive/physical development**
- Pays attention to faces
- Begins to follow things with eyes and recognize people from a distance
- Begins to act bored if activity doesn’t change
- Can hold head up and begins to push up when lying on tummy
- Makes smoother movements with arms and legs

**Talk to your doctor if your baby:**
- Doesn’t respond to loud sounds
- Doesn’t watch things as they move
- Doesn’t smile at people
- Doesn’t bring hands to mouth
- Can’t hold head up when pushing up when on tummy

**How you can help your child learn and grow:**
- Cuddle, talk, sing and play with your baby during feeding, dressing and bathing. Copy your baby’s sounds sometimes, but also use clear, adult language. Play peek-a-boo. Help your baby play peek-a-boo too. Place a baby-safe mirror in your baby’s crib so she can look at herself. Look at pictures with your baby and talk about them. Lay your baby on his tummy when he is awake and put toys near him. Encourage your baby to lift his head by holding toys at eye level in front of him. Hold a toy or rattle above your baby’s head and encourage her to reach for it. Hold your baby upright with is feet on the floor. Sing or talk to your baby as he is upright.

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