Sometimes my child seems to spend more time looking at the pictures than reading. Is this a problem?

Question 4 from *Helping Your Child Become a Reader*
(Scanlon, Anderson, Barnes, Morse, & Yurkewecz-Stellato, 2024[1])

No. At early points in development, the letters in printed words should be used in combination with the pictures to determine the identity of unfamiliar printed words. In books written for beginning readers, the pictures are often intended to help children figure out the words that they cannot yet read by using only the letters and their sounds. Also, the pictures often provide the beginning reader with important information about what's happening in the book that the words do not tell. Therefore, children will understand the book better, and find reading easier and more interesting, if they look carefully at the pictures. Looking at the pictures is generally something to encourage while also encouraging the child to increasingly attend to the letters in unknown words. Early on, they may only be able to pay attention to one or two letters in an unfamiliar word – typically the first letter(s). As they gain experience, children increasingly need to look carefully at more of the print information.   If your child is not looking at the words while "reading," encourage them to run their finger under the print and/or demonstrate how to do this when your read to them. This may help the child begin to focus on the print and realize that readers read the printed words.

What Not to Do

On occasion, caregivers report having covered the pictures in books with repeating patterns and/or asking children to start at the end of the book and read the book "backwards." These practices can confuse children about the concepts such books are designed to help teach. Further, doing so can frustrate children and thereby interfere with their reading progress. The goal is for beginning readers to view reading as pleasurable and interesting activities.

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[1] The complete 23 question booklet can be accessed at: eltep.org/isa-parent-booklet
All individual questions and the complete booklet can be shared for non-commercial purposes.