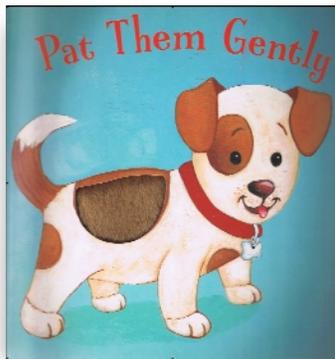


# Book Nook

## Using Books to Support Social Emotional Development



***Pat Them Gently***  
By Melanie O'Brien  
Baby Piggy Toes Press

*Pat Them Gently* provides a wonderful introduction for young children to begin to understand what it means to be gentle to animals. Each page provides simple instructions (“Say a quiet ‘hello’ and be very slow”) along with friendly, furry illustrations that children can use to practice patting gently. The skills children learn from this book will apply not only to animals, but also to how they can be gentle with other children. (Ages 1-4)

### Examples of activities that can be used while reading *Pat Them Gently* and throughout the day to promote social and emotional development:

- Before reading the book, ask the children if they know what it means to be gentle. Ask questions like, “If I touch something very softly, am I being gentle?” or “If I want my voice to be gentle, should I talk loudly or quietly?” These questions will help children start to think about what the word “gentle” means, and what behaviors they can use to be gentle or not gentle. Tell the children that you are going to read a book about being gentle to animals. Ask why they think it is important to be gentle to animals (so that the animal doesn’t get hurt or scared, so that children won’t get hurt).
- While reading, allow children to take turns practicing “patting gently” with the furry illustrations in the book. You can demonstrate with the first illustration, and repeat as needed to remind the children what gentle patting looks like. The next time you read the book, try giving each child a stuffed animal to hold while you are reading the story. Have them pat their stuffed animal gently each time you read those words in the book.
- After reading the book, ask children if they can think of other times when they might need to be gentle (for example: if they give a friend a hug, when they are playing, when there is a baby around). You can help them think of different situations (think of the times that you tell children to “be gentle,” what are some of those situations). Go through each situation and explain why being gentle is important. Some of the reasons might be similar to the ones they came up with for animals, (so no one gets hurt) and new reasons (so that toys don’t get broken). Talk about how important it is to be gentle to other children. Throughout the day, let children know when you notice them being gentle! If someone needs a reminder about being gentle, ask if they remember practicing patting gently in *Pat Them Gently*. Can they try to do that again?
- Use the story as a way to talk about pets in general. Ask children about any pets that they might have at home. They can even bring in a picture of their pet if they have one. Ask children how it makes them feel to be around a pet. Does it make you happy? nervous? excited? Some children like being around pets very much, but some children might not. Some children might like small



pets like cats, but feel unsure about big pets like some dogs. Remind children then even if they like animals very much, they should always follow the directions they learned in *Pat Them Gently*, such as, “When you meet a pet, don’t touch them yet,” and “First ask ‘Please’”

- If none of the children in the class are allergic to pets, try bringing a real pet to class one day. Check to see if there are therapy animals in your area that could come visit your class! Therapy animals are often used in hospitals or nursing homes, and are specially trained to be very calm and friendly. Before letting children touch the animal, read the book together again to remind everyone how to be gentle. Let each child have a turn petting the animal, using the steps they learned in the book (First say please, talk quietly to them, and of course “Pat them gently!”) Take a picture of each child with the pet and put the photos on a “We Can Be Gentle!” bulletin board in the classroom. Seeing these pictures in the classroom will help children to remember their gentle behavior every day.

Reading the same book for several days in a row is a great way to provide opportunities for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers to develop a sense of competence and confidence, which is an important part of social and emotional development. They become able to turn pages, point at and label pictures, talk about the story, predict what will happen next, learn new vocabulary words, talk about their own experiences in relation to the story and even make up their own story! Try reading *Pat Them Gently* for several days in a row and use some of the ideas, activities, and teaching opportunities listed below to enhance social and emotional skills.

## Being Gentle

**Art:** Remind the children how they were able to pat the furry animals in *Pat Them Gently*. Tell them that they can make their own furry animal to pat gently just like the ones in the book! Make sure the *Pat Them Gently* book is in the art center so children can look at the pictures to get ideas for their own drawings. Provide cotton balls, furry fabric, and/or felt for children to glue on their animals to create the furry spot. Toddlers will probably need more help in creating their furry animals (consider providing pictures of dogs and cats that toddlers can color and then glue furry material on their animals). After the children complete their drawings, bind the pictures together to make a We Pat Them Gently classroom book. Read the book and let each child pat his or her own illustration as you read.

**Dramatic Play:** Create a “Pat Them Gently” Clinic in the dramatic play center. Encourage children to use stuffed animals, baby dolls, etc. to practice being gentle. Children can introduce their pets or babies to one another, allowing everyone lots of practice at using the steps in the book. Ask the children if they can remember how they learned to be gentle in *Pat Them Gently* and remind them of the different ways to be gentle to pets and to other children (ask please, talk softly, touch softly).