

Talking With Your Child¹

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One of the most important things that your child must learn is how to talk. On average, a child will say his or her first word at 12 months of age, and may start speaking anywhere from 8–18 months of age. Between 18 months and 2 years, your toddler will speak in two-word “sentences.” By the time your child reaches 3 years, s/he will have a large vocabulary; and by age 6, s/he will know about 10,000 words and be a capable conversationalist.

Your child's language skills show how well his or her brain and thought processes are developing. Children also develop emotionally and build social skills through conversation. In fact, early language skills help children to adjust more easily to difficult circumstances. Toddlers with advanced language development are more likely to do well socially, academically, and behaviorally in later childhood.

How and when your child's language develops depends on the circumstance. For example, girls' vocabulary grows faster than boys'. Cautious toddlers who are more reserved may take more time to understand words before they begin to speak. Also, mothers and fathers may influence their children's learning of language differently; when fathers talk

with young children they are more likely to give directions, ask them “who, what, where, why, and when” questions for clarification, use imperatives, and refer to past events than mothers. These behaviors are likely to challenge children's language development.

There are many ways you can help your child learn to talk. This can be done by finding natural opportunities in everyday situations to encourage communication. Here are a couple of suggestions to help your child's language skills to develop.

- From the moment your child is born, talk to your baby. You can call the child's name, and sing to him or her.
- Use “child-directed speech” (CDS). CDS involves speaking in a high-pitched voice, using short sentences, pausing between phrases, annunciating clearly, using expressive emotional tones, and repeating new words in different contexts.
- Talk to your baby during daily routines such as when you cuddle, feed, or change his or her diaper.

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- Repeat the noises your baby makes, and encourage him or her to imitate the sounds you make.
- Call your baby's name often. Remember to point out objects to the baby and call them by name. Say to the baby, "See the chair; see the bird; see the truck."
- Refer to what you're doing during daily activities. For example, say, "It's time to change your diaper" or "We're eating breakfast."



- When your baby becomes a toddler, teach him or her names of emotions they feel. "You're angry because we can't play now. It's time for bed." "I know the doggie scared you. The dog went outside."
- Remember, your baby has to learn the names of as many objects, routines, actions, and emotions as possible.
- When your child begins to talk, listen to him or her. Avoid correcting or using phrases like, "It's NOT 'goed', it's 'went'!" Instead, simply repeat what the child said, pronouncing the

words correctly and using the correct grammar. Children make natural mistakes when they are learning grammar (such as putting "-ed" endings on all verbs in the past tense). They will learn the exceptions to the rules when they are ready and taught with patience.

- Avoid asking your child yes-or-no questions. For example, ask instead, "Do you want milk or juice?" In this way, your child can answer using names of the object or activity they choose.
- Help your child learn new words every day. Soon, s/he or she will begin to ask questions about objects ("What?").
- Your child will also ask about cause and effect ("Why?"). Do not ignore his or her questions—instead, try to answer them. If you do not know the answers, tell your child that you do not know. Share the answers that you do know using simple words or a cause-and-effect explanation.

If you want your children to talk with you when they are older, remember to talk with them when they are young. Conversations are an important part of quality parent-child relationships. Warm communication that encourages your child's cognitive, social, and emotional skills lasts a lifetime.



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