

Let's Talk About...

Talking with Your Young Child

One of the most important ways to stimulate your child's language development is to talk with them. Talking with your child also helps them establish a good relationship with you and can even boost your child's self-confidence and social skills later in life. Try these ideas in your daily routines, such as bathing, mealtime, playtime, and washing.

Tune-in and talk slowly

Tune-in to your child's play, conversation, and thoughts. Look at your child, listen to what they say, and let them talk. If you are too busy right now, explain why you cannot listen now, and that you will talk later at a given time. For example: "That's neat! First I have to finish my work, then I can play with you." Often adults talk too fast for a young child to follow easily, so slow down.

Make talking fun and meaningful

Praise your child when they say new words or use correct speech sounds. Please do not encourage baby talk or mispronounce sounds with your toddlers. Do not force your child to display their speech for friends and relatives. Rather, bring up topics with a hint or two and let your child expand or participate if they choose. For example: "We had fun today at the park."

Look at your child and meet your child's same eye level

Adults frequently chat with children while doing tasks like dishwashing or shopping for groceries. This is fine, but talk will be most helpful if your child can see your face, especially your mouth, while you speak. If you meet your child's eye level by sitting or kneeling, it sends a message that they are important. This can help their self-esteem.

Talk about the here and now

Talk about things as they take place or just after they happen and get your child involved whenever possible. Events in the past or future may be harder for your child to discuss or understand.



Talk about what the two of you are doing

Using 2- to 3-word phrases, comment about things as they happen. Limit asking questions and, instead, talk about the objects your child is playing with, and label everything. Sing nursery rhymes or create songs about the activity you are doing together.

Repeat words and phrases often

Pleasant repetition of the same word gives your child many chances to listen, understand, and imitate. Not only repeat the word but demonstrate how to expand on the word too. For example: "Blue, the sky is blue!"

Simplify the environment

Turn off the television, radio, and electronic devices. Spend a few minutes alone with your child, away from the distractions of older children and other adults. This way you make your voice the center of attention. Fun activities include reading books, playing games, and blowing bubbles.

Clarify the meaning of your child's speech when it is unclear

If your child says “uh duh atdide?” while standing at the door pulling on the knob, you can say, “Outside? I want to go outside?” This provides a correct model of speech so your child has a chance to listen to and imitate the words.

Give feedback and expand

Repeat what your child says. Correct any incorrect sounds and words or add new information.

For example:

Child: Kitty tree.

Adult: Yes, the kitty's in the tree.

Child: Come.

Adult: OK. I'll come and see.

Use self-talk

Talk about what you're doing. Describe each action and object. Leave some pauses so your child can participate if they want.

Use parallel talk

This is the same thing as self-talk except you describe and talk about what your child is doing. For example: “Oh, you drew a circle. It's a big, round, red circle. It looks like a ball.” This is especially good because it focuses on describing rather than approving. This allows your child to feel good about their actions rather than seek adult approval.

Name and point

Name things for your child. It is ok to use new words that your child does not know yet. Remember that children can usually understand more than they can say.

Fill-in-the-blank

Start a sentence and let your child finish.

For example:

Adult: I have a cow. A cow says, “moo.” What does that cow say? The cow says _____.

Child: Moo!

If, after a few seconds, your child does not know, you can offer some help. If an incomplete or incorrect word is given, gently introduce the one you were looking for.

Make mistakes

Make obvious mistakes in your language that your child may notice, such as in logic or storytelling. This does not include grammatical mistakes. Pause and wait for a response — it will usually come. Then use the language for expanding.

For example:

Adult: I think that the bathtub should go in the kitchen.

Child: No! In the bathroom.

Adult: Oh yes. It goes in the bathroom.

Read and talk about books

This is very important, and all of the above suggestions apply when reading books. While you read, talk and get your child to talk or tell the story if they choose.

Praise, praise, praise!

Make your child feel special. This also means you should be careful not to say anything negative about your child when they are present. Be positive and supportive. This cannot be overdone!



