



Talk, Talk, Talk

Talking and listening are the most important things you can do with babies and toddlers. Your exchanges with individual children build your relationship—and your children’s brains! The more words babies and toddlers hear in back-and-forth conversation, and the more they communicate back, the faster and more fully their language will develop.

- **Take the time and effort to figure out how to get each baby’s attention.** Talk with parents to learn what they do. Experiment with different combinations of voice, touch, and eye contact and with softer or louder voices until baby is alert, happy, and ready to play!
- **Make sure each child hears a lot of language throughout the day.** Speak directly to a baby in ways that capture his attention and invite a response. Whenever a baby is awake and alert, make responsive, baby-engaging talk part of your activities.
- **Consider teaching older babies Baby Signs or another sign language.** Research shows that babies’ spoken language develops faster when adults use and pair gestures with words. Be sure to teach the signs to family members and everyone who interacts with the baby so they can understand what she is trying to communicate.
- **Talk with your hands to help toddlers understand what your words refer to.** You can point, gesture, or demonstrate to help toddlers learn the meaning of words.
- **Plan times for one-on-one conversations with every child.** Give extra time to those lagging in their language development. Reduce noise and distractions so you can pay close attention to what a child is saying and he can hear each syllable in the words you say. This will allow you to engage in longer conversations.
- **Talk with babies and toddlers about their feelings.** Express your empathy when a child seems sad, distressed, or hurt. Share her joy with your words, facial expression, and body language when she is happy, proud, or excited.
- **Support children’s home languages** by learning key words and terms of encouragement and endearment. Pair gestures with words to help children learn each other’s languages.
- **Ask children questions whose answers you really want to know.** Genuine questions spark conversation and help keep it going. Your interest in children’s opinions, ideas, feelings, and experiences supports children’s self-confidence and language development.
- **Be patient when talking with toddlers.** Remember that toddlers are still learning to stick to a subject, so be patient, take breaks, and give them time to respond.
- **Introduce babies to other languages if you are multilingual.** The window for hearing all language sounds is small and babies can really benefit from hearing both their non-native language and their native language from a loved caregiver.