



Talk, Talk, Talk!

From the moment of birth, every word you share with your child helps his brain grow and develop. One of the best things you can do to help your child learn is to talk to him throughout the day—even when he is just a baby.

To really learn words and how language works, your child needs to hear and know lots of conversation, starting at birth. At age 1, your baby should say at least a few words and you will have found many ways to communicate with each other. By age 2, your toddler's speech is starting to take off, but he can understand more than he can actually say. Between the ages of 2 and 3, your child is ready to learn and use hundreds of words.

For your child, these incredible first years are all about learning. Talking to your baby as he grows will make learning possible. But talking and listening to your child will also show him your love and help you build a happy and healthy relationship.

- Make talk part of all your daily routines. Talk to help your child transition from one activity to another. Say: *Are you awake? Let me pick you up from your crib.*
- Speak to your baby in the language you feel most comfortable using.
- You don't always have to be the one to start the conversation! Listen and respond to babbles and coos. That's your baby's way of talking to you.
- To encourage and respond to his cooing and babbling, interact with your baby face-to-face as much as possible.
- When your baby makes a sound, imitate her. Make the same sound she makes at first, but then to keep her interested and interacting, try adding to or changing the sound. If she says *ba* repeat *ba* to her. Give her a chance to respond and then try *ba-bee!*

- Talking is a natural part of many of the activities you do with your child, from reading aloud to singing to counting fingers and toes!
- Make talk a part of play. Talk is part of play when you say, *Where's baby? Peek-a-boo!* It's also part of play when you make your child's toys "speak"—the stuffed cow says *moo* or the toy car says *vroom vroom*.
- Encourage and respond to the different ways your child communicates with you. When he points, babbles, makes animal or vehicle sounds, uses gestures or sings, or tries to say words, repeat back what he is trying to say and then add a bit more to keep the conversation going.
- Your child can understand much more than she can say! Be sure to give her time to respond to your comments, questions, or directions. Wait patiently while she figures out how to respond.
- Just because your child is little doesn't mean you have to use little words or short sentences. Use full sentences and interesting words. If your toddler says *Go park*, you could respond: *It is a gorgeous day to go to the park. Let's get your stroller and go!*
- As you comment on what's going on, use "grown-up" words to enrich your child's vocabulary. You could say, *This traffic is so aggravating!* Or *Here we are at the pediatrician's office—just in time for our appointment.* Or *Look at that enormous tree!*
- Going out to the store or a trip to the zoo or the aquarium gives you a lot to talk about with your child. Name and describe what you put into the grocery cart or talk about the kinds of animals or fish that you see.
- Encourage others, such as family members and caregivers, to keep the conversation going and continue using lots of words with your child.