

Talk, Talk, Talk: Language Development in Children

At one year old, Sofia waves her hand and says something that sounds like “Hi!” She babbles a couple syllables that sound a lot like “mama.” Are those her first words, does she know what she’s saying, or is she just experimenting and has no idea what the words mean? Perhaps the answer to those questions has more to do with how her parents, siblings, grandparents, and other caregivers respond to her, and whether they reinforce what she seems to be saying by talking back to her and encouraging her to keep talking.

Studies show that there is a definite link between how much parents and caregivers talk to their children and their language development and readiness for school.



The more parents and caregivers talk to their babies and preschoolers, the larger their vocabulary. These studies also show that children who come from lower socio-economic environments hear far fewer words spoken to them, and that the more words a child hears before age three, the better they do in school. So talking to very young children is extremely important not only for their general emotional well-being, but also for language development and future school success.

Tips for helping young children develop their language skills

Typical two-year-olds know 20-200 words, and typical three-year-olds know about 1000 words. To help young children continue to learn new words and develop their language skills, consider these tips:

- Talk, talk, talk! Talk about what you're doing now, what you're going to do next, etc. Talk while you're making dinner, riding in the car, taking a walk, or getting dressed or ready for bed.
- Copy a baby or toddler's sounds and encourage him to imitate you; put words to her sounds.
- Read books every day; let the child look at books at his own pace; talk about the pictures on each page.
- Instead of correcting a child's mispronunciation or bad grammar, repeat what she says back to her with the correct pronunciation.
- Help the child build complete sentences; e.g., if the child says, "Mommy go?" answer with, "Yes, Mommy is going to work now?"
- Sing songs, make up silly rhymes, or read poems.
- Ask open-ended questions that invite the child to say more than just "yes" or "no."
- Make up stories or tell stories about yourself when you were growing up.

R E S O U R C E S

Learning is Everywhere. PA's Promise for Children.
papromiseforchildren.com/learning-is-everywhere

The Power of Talking to Your Baby. Tina Rosenberg. New York Times. April 10, 2013. <https://nyti.ms/2lFpLKU>

Supporting Language and Literacy Skills from 0-12 Months.
ZERO TO THREE. <http://bit.ly/2l9rfgk>

9 Ways to Help Your Child's Language Development.
Colleen Davis Gardephe. Parents. <http://bit.ly/2mDV5tA>

Programs and families can contact the program leadership directly at PAIECMH@pakeys.org with questions or concerns.

