



# How to Help Language Develop

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Parents play an important role in helping their children learn to use language. Your child needs you and other members of your family to talk to him or her often. The best messages you can communicate to young children are ones that make them feel good about themselves and their activities.

- Your child will begin to communicate with you by using gestures and sounds. At the start, accept your child's gestures as a way of asking for things or explaining feelings and events, but use the appropriate words when you respond. When your child points to a ball, for instance, say, "Ball. Here's the ball you wanted."
- When your child begins to use words, let your child know you have understood the message. For example, restate a sentence that was abbreviated, disjointed, or misspoken. ("Thank you for telling me about your new baby.") This will tell your child how the language ought to sound and let the new speaker know you understood.
- Be careful how you make direct corrections of mispronunciations and grammar. Never laugh at your child's errors. You do not want to inhibit the exploration of speech. Also do not repeat language errors since your child will be trying to talk like you. Copying you and trying to both please you and communicate ideas to you are the most important reasons your child has for learning to speak.
- Talk to your child in a natural, conversational voice with short, simple phrases with obvious meanings. Nouns with clear definitions are the easiest words for your child to understand.
- Help children learn to listen and respond to each other. This will stimulate both language development and social interaction.
- Encourage even young children to use the correct word when asking for something. Do not respond to whining or tugging on your clothing in place of verbal requests that you know they can say in words. If you do respond to whining and tugging, you will be encouraging those unappealing behaviors.
- When you are listening to your child speaking to you, give your undivided attention. This lets your child know you value his or her words and thoughts and encourages words rather than whining. It also shows the child that it is important to pay attention and listen with eyes focused on the speaker, hands unoccupied, and the mind on the subject at hand.
- Do not repeat directions often. First, say the child's name and wait until the child looks at you and is listening. Then tell your child what you want done once and wait for the child to do it. Speak slowly, be certain you are heard, and use short sentences. Be patient and give your child time to think about what you said and then act. When you keep repeating, children soon learn they don't have to listen the first few times.
- Avoid curse words and harsh language or you will hear your child saying them later. Would you feel comfortable about scolding your child for using language learned from you? Use stuffed animals or puppets to encourage your child to discover and name things. This will help increase vocabulary and attention to language structure.
- Encourage each child to point to the parts of the body as you name them. When that can be done well, try having the child name facial features and body parts as you point to them. Knowing body parts will later help your child in large movement planning.



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- Use specific and accurate words first and then add a brief comment about the concept. “Don’t touch the hot pot. You will get burned.” Your child cannot understand a longer explanation so it would only be confusing.
- Use action words if you are playing with or watching children play. “Are you *rocking* your doll to sleep?” “Isn’t it fun to *roll* the ball?”
- Use words that describe space to help your child understand these concepts. “Let’s walk *away from* the swings.” “Can I help you get *into* the wagon?”

Condensed from Chapter 5 of *Toddler Development, Toys, and Activities: One to Three Years*.

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