

L is for Language

Creating a Language-Rich Environment

Children develop language-related skills long before they say their first words. Communication, or sending and receiving messages, between an infant and caregiver occurs through an infant's use of eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, and sounds. Around their first birthday, young children often begin using simple words to communicate. From birth, children's everyday interactions influence brain development and how they will share ideas with others. Research shows there are many ways to create language-rich environments through **relationships**, **repetition**, and **routines**.

Language-Building Strategies

Here are four strategies for nourishing young children's communication and language during everyday interactions.

Strategy 1. Join children in routines and activities.

Joining young children as they play or participate in daily routines, like meals or chores, provides repeated opportunities to interact with others. These interactions build the foundation for communication and language.

Strategy 2. Talk about what children are doing or what they see you doing.

Watch what interests a child and talk about it with him or her. Label things that the child is interacting with (e.g., "That's your ball.") or doing (e.g., "You are standing."). Children also learn words by listening to others talk. The more words you use to describe your and the child's experiences, the more opportunities the child will have to hear new words and practice using them. Encourage everyone who interacts with the child to provide a language-rich environment.

Strategy 3. Respond to children's communication.

Children communicate using eye contact, gestures, facial expressions, sounds, and words. Responding to children when they communicate encourages them to take turns while talking. This sometimes is referred to as serve and return interactions.

Strategy 4. Read and sing songs.

Reading books and singing songs teach children about the rhythm and sounds of language. Reading and singing also help children to learn how to sequence words and increases their vocabulary.

What We are Doing

The Anita Zucker Center and our collaborators work to support families and practitioners to implement everyday strategies to help children build communication and language skills.

Language-Building Strategies for Children 2 to 3 Years Old

Strategy 1. Join children in routines and activities.

- Help the child with chores. For example, help her clean up her spot at the table. Say, "Put your napkin in the trash." When she puts the napkin in the trash, say, "You are really helping me! What else can you do to clean up?"
- Build something together with blocks or other household materials like paper towel tubes. Ask questions about what to build or what to put on next.

Strategy 2. Talk about what children are doing or what they see you doing.

- Describe the steps of a routine as you do them. For example, when it is time to brush teeth, say, "First we get the toothpaste...Now we brush... Turn on the water....It's time to rinse the toothbrush." Engage the child in describing what happens next in the sequence by not completing the sentence "Now we br..." [brush]. "Turn on the wa..." [water].
- Use words to describe objects and actions. For example, "I made a *tall* tower." "You are running *fast*." "It's a *yellow* car." "It's a *big* block."

Strategy 3. Respond to children's communication.

- When the child asks a question, answer the question as soon as possible and then ask the child a related question.
- If the child asks to play or tries to talk and you are busy, say, "I can't talk/play right now, but I want to talk/play with you later."

Strategy 4. Read and sing songs.

- While reading, talk about the pictures and characters in the book. Try describing characters' feelings or encourage the child to use words to describe the objects, characters, or actions shown in the picture.
- When singing familiar songs, sing one line of the song and then pause and wait for the child to take a turn singing the next line.

These illustrated strategies follow the milestones identified in the CDC guidelines for children from birth to five years old. For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/ActEarly.

