

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 Newborns (Less than 4 months)

Strategy 1. Join children in routines and activities.

- During tummy time, lay down so a newborn can see your face. Repeat sounds she makes.
- Keep a newborn's attention by making different sounds and using different tones in your voice.

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

- Use 1 to 2 words to label objects you see or actions you do as you play with a newborn during everyday routines like dressing and bathing.
- During tummy time, label the toys a newborn looks at or reaches for (e.g., "That's a rattle.").

Strategy 3. Respond to children's communication.

- When a newborn cries, respond with appropriate attention and care (e.g., pick her up and make soothing noises).
- When a newborn coos, respond with a smile, similar noises, and eye contact (e.g., "Yes, *ahhh*.").

Strategy 4. Read and sing songs.

- Show a newborn bright, colorful pictures in books or magazines and use 1 to 2 words to label the pictures.
- Sing songs in the language you are most comfortable using.

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.

