

# 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 Older Infants (9 to 12 months)

### Strategy 1. Join children in routines and activities.

- Take turns while playing games with an older infant. For example, roll a toy car and wait for the infant to roll it back. Take another turn and continue the back-and-forth interaction. You might also make a “vroom” sound when rolling the car back and forth or say “I’m rolling the *car*.”
- Sit near an older infant during a meal time. Look at him and smile as you talk about what he is eating or how it tastes.

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

- When you walk outside, describe what you do, see, or hear. For example, point to the sky and say, “I hear an *airplane*.”
- Describe what you or an older infant does during a diaper change. For example, if she kicks her feet and smiles, say, “You look *happy*,” and emphasize the word *happy*.

### Strategy 3. Respond to children's communication.

- Pay attention to how an older infant responds to new situations. If he starts to cry in a new situation, try to soothe him.
- Describe what an older infant wants when she reaches for something. For example, if she reaches her arms up, say, “You want me to pick you *up*,” and emphasize the word *up*.

### Strategy 4. Read and sing songs.

- Read to an older infant daily. Help her turn the pages. Label pictures and then wait to see if she tries to copy any of the sounds you make or pats pictures when you name them.
- Sing songs in the language you are most comfortable using. Encourage an older infant to make sounds or gestures as you sing.

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](http://www.cdc.gov/ActEarly).

