

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 Young Infants (5 to 8 months)

Strategy 1. Join children in routines and activities.

- When you are changing a young infant's diaper, imitate his sounds and see if he will make another sound back at you. When he does, repeat the sound again and continue back-and-forth (serve and return) interactions for a few turns.
- Play with a young infant during activities or with toys she likes. Make different sounds or say a word and then wait to see if she makes a sound.

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

- During diaper changes, describe your and the infant's actions and facial expressions. For example, "Look at that happy smile!"
- Repeat sounds an infant makes and say simple words with those sounds. For example, if an infant makes the sound "baa" while playing with a ball, say, "ball."

Strategy 3. Respond to children's communication.

- When an infant looks at something, point to it and label it. For example, if she looks toward a book, point at the book and say, "You see the *book*." Emphasize the word *book*.
- When an infant babbles, respond with similar noises and eye contact. For example, if an infant makes the "waa" sound, say, "waa, waa." You might then make a different sound "ma, ma" and see if the child imitates you.

Strategy 4. Read and sing songs.

- Look at and read books to an infant every day. Reread books often; infants learn words by hearing them repeatedly.
- Use facial expressions to show emotions when singing songs. For example, smile big with your eyes wide while singing, "If You're Happy and You Know It."

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.

