

# 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 Toddlers (13 to 18 months)

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

- Play pretend with a young toddler using toys such as dolls and play food. Help him feed a doll or take turns putting play food in a bowl or on a plate. Map language onto the actions (e.g., “feed the baby,” “the apple tastes good,” or “stir the food”).
- Sit near a young toddler as she looks at books. Take turns turning the pages or help her turn the pages and talk about the pictures in the book. Ask the child to point to pictures when you name them. You can also ask the child to name the pictures or make sounds that relate to the pictures.

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

- During bath time, describe how a young toddler plays or what you do as you bathe her. For example, if she splashes her hands in the water, say, “You are splashing!” As you scoop water to rinse her hair, say, “I am getting some water. Next, I will rinse your hair.”
- Use words to describe your and a young toddler’s feelings. For example, if a young toddler rubs her eyes and cries near nap time, say, “You look sleepy.”

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

- Respond to gestures, sounds, or simple words of a young toddler by labeling objects, actions, or feelings. For example, if a young toddler points to a cup, say, “cup” as you give the cup to her. If she says, “aah” while you put on her sock, say, “Yes, sock.”
- When a young toddler says a word, respond by repeating the word and adding more words. For example, if a young toddler says, “nana” while eating a banana, say, “It’s a sweet banana.”

### Strategy 4. Read and sing songs.

- Read books to a young toddler every day. Label the pictures in the book and then pause to see if she tries to repeat the word. If the child points to and names a picture in the book, respond by repeating the word and adding more words. For example, if a young toddler says “meow” and points to a cat, say, “Yes, it’s a cat and it says ‘meow’.”
- Sing songs with actions (e.g., “The Itsy Bitsy Spider”) and encourage a young toddler to do the actions and sing with you.

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).

