

Tip Sheets

Infants and Toddlers: Best Practices to Support the Development of Communication Skills



The development of speech and language is best promoted in the context of relationships and routine activities that are meaningful

to the child. The following are some examples of best practices to support the development of communication skills when working with infants and toddlers.

Focus on building relationships with each child and being an understanding language partner.

Children will want to communicate when they feel secure and loved and will communicate more frequently when they know their attempts to elicit interaction will be effective.

Be responsive and promote turn-taking.

Being responsive will let children know that they can communicate to get needs met. And turn-taking helps children to learn the social rules of conversation. When responding, wait for the child to take turns using sounds, words, or sentences. Vocabulary will be built as caregivers respond and take turns with children.

Respond to nonverbal communication.

Infants communicate in many ways. For example, they may yawn when tired or bored, turn away when needing a break, and arch their back when angry or uncomfortable. Being responsive to these communication attempts confirms that the caregiver is an available communication partner.

Infants who are responded to will soon begin to communicate with sounds.

Employ the use of self-talk and parallel talk.

Use self-talk and parallel talk to relate an action or manipulation of an object to words to make language have meaning for the child.

- **Self-talk** occurs when a caregiver describes what he/she is doing with an infant or toddler. For example, "It is time to change your diaper. I am going to pick you up now and put you on the changing table. It will feel so good to have a dry diaper..."
- **Parallel talk** occurs when a caregiver talks about what the child is doing. For example, "You are playing with the monkey. You used your hand to pick up the monkey. Now the Monkey is in your mouth..."

Talk with children often, being sure to use a rich and varied vocabulary.

Communication skills of infants and toddlers are related to the number of words, types of words, number of conversations and positive interactions they have daily with caregivers.

Use semantically responsive talk.

Semantics deals with the meaning of a word, phrase or sentence. When a caregiver expands on the meaning of what is being talked about the child is more likely to focus attention on the topic longer and attach meaning.

Listen with your eyes.

Be fully engaged and focused on the interaction with the infant or toddler.

Use the four 'E' approach.

1. Encourage children to communicate by listening, being responsive, and not correcting their attempts to communicate.
2. Expand on the semantics (meaning of words) and syntax (arrangement of words and phrases) in conversations.
3. Elaborate on words and sentences by adding to what the child has said.
4. Elongate or lengthen sounds, words and sentences by adding a new or different sound/word, new word, or longer sentence. Imitate the child and expand what he/she says.

Use questions.

Questions can be used to begin a conversation or gain information. Use open-ended questions, which have more than one acceptable answer, and choice questions.

Read, sing, use finger-plays and social games.

Make language learning fun!

Additional Resources

Center for Disease Control and Prevention:
Child Development Positive Parenting Tips
<http://www.cdc.gov>

Talking is Teaching
<http://talkingisteaching.org>

Zero to Three
<http://www.zerotothree.org>

For more information, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

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