

Helping Your Child Understand and Use Language

You can make a big difference in your child's success with language. First, you can provide many opportunities to talk together. Second, you can offer interesting things and ideas that your child will want to talk about.

Young children are active language learners. Their brains are especially ready to acquire a system of communication.

Language is best learned in relationship with others, through back-and-forth interactions. Talk to your child about things in their environment, activities you are doing together, and the relationship of familiar items to new concepts. (For example: A donut is round; the sun is also round.)

The ways you use language are also important. Try to talk with and make comments to your child more often than you ask them questions or give directions.

Your child is experimenting with the sounds and structure of language. When they make a grammar mistake, don't correct them. It's enough to simply use the sentence correctly in conversation.

If they say, "I eated lunch," you can say, "Yes, you ate your lunch."

Tips for helping children understand and use language

- > Talk often with your child so that they have many opportunities to hear language and to learn the meaning of new words.
- > Help build your child's vocabulary by reading to them and explaining new vocabulary words and concepts.
- > During reading activities, ask your child to point to and label objects and actions, describe what has happened in the book or share their reaction to the story.
- > Directions and questions should be short, or given in small segments and repeated if necessary.
- > Get your child's attention and make eye contact before giving directions or asking questions.
- > Model appropriate grammar.
- > Encourage questioning by letting your child ask for things they need rather than offering things to them.
- > Respond to what your child says and give them time to respond to what you say. This encourages conversational turn-taking skills.
- > Follow your child's lead when choosing a topic for conversation. Stick with what they want to talk about—this prompts them to talk longer.
- > Avoid interrupting your child while they talk.
- > Listen to what your child has to say. Let them know you heard them.

Your child learns more language from the people around them than they would learn from even the most engaging video or website.



Take time to think about your child.

Some parents enjoy talking in the car, giving everyone a much-needed break from technology. Others really enjoy the ritual of talking before bed. What are good times to get conversation going with your child?

Which strategies for helping your child learn language come most easily to you?

Which feel more challenging to you?