



a tipsheet for parents and caregivers of children ages 0 to 2

Baby Talk in 3-D

Children learn language from hearing it, and they start this process at birth. Their brains are hungry for sound and take in everything around them, especially language. It's important not to miss the amazing things happening during these early moments. Babies are constantly listening, analyzing, and storing what they hear in simple categories, until they are ready to use it. Here are some ways to support language development in young children:

Self-Talk: This is when adults use short sentences to talk about what is happening. For example, if clothes are being folded, an adult could say to a baby, "Mommy is folding clothes. Your pajamas smell so nice now," or "Your blanket is so warm and toasty!"

Parallel Talk: Parallel talk is similar to self-talk, except rather than reflecting on what the adult is seeing, hearing or doing; conversation is focused on what a child is doing. If a child were playing with blocks, an adult could support the child by saying, "I see you have the blue block. You put the little red block on top of the big green one. Those stacked blocks are tall."

Descriptions: Simply describing baby's surroundings helps them attach words to people and objects. For example, "That black dog is big and fluffy!"

Expansion: Expansion is when the words of a child are acknowledged and then further described by an adult to add detail. This process is like "decorating" the words of a child, rather than "correcting." If a child says, "Car go!" an adult could enhance that by saying, "Yes, I see that car going too!" To expand even further, "Yes, I see that red car too! It's going fast!"

When speaking with very young children, always remember to:

- Speak slowly and clearly
- Use lots of eye contact
- Have animated and friendly facial expressions
- Repeat words as needed
- Keep background noises to a minimum
- Use people's names consistently
- Use the same names for items (such as calling a pacifier a "binky")

Read babies cues to know when they are ready to play, learn and listen. It is important to avoid "over talking" when supporting baby's play. When a baby is exploring the world on her own, a responsive adult waits for the baby to glance back at them to share "wonder words" together.



We don't teach children to talk, they simply play with the words we give them.
~Wendy Sullivan

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