



Early Learning Digest

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Talk to Your Baby! Use Parentese to Promote Language

When you see a baby you probably start talking in a high-pitched tone and stretching out your vowels. "Whooose a pretty baybeeee?" Experts call this way of talking "parentese" and report there is true value in it. Parentese helps parents and caregivers connect to their babies and helps babies develop language skills.

So what makes parentese unique?

Parentese features well-formed, elongated consonants and vowels. We tend to pronounce words precisely when we talk to babies – pulling out the vowel sounds and clearly voicing consonants – in marked contrast to the hurried way we speak to other adults. A "sweet baby" becomes a bright "sweeeeet baybeeee." Move in close so your baby can see your eyes widen and sparkle and your lips move.

Parentese delights babies. Research shows that infants actually prefer parentese to adult conversations. They will turn their head to hear it, even if it's spoken in a foreign language. Babies not only enjoy the high-pitched sounds, they also like watching our faces as we talk to them.



Parentese helps babies learn language. The elongated vowels, high pitch, exaggerated facial expressions and short, simple sentences actually help infants learn language. Their brains are "mapping" the sounds they are hearing. Talking in a way that gets their attention also helps them learn to speak and understand language.

There is a difference between baby talk and parentese. Baby talk uses sounds and nonsense words. Parentese uses actual words, in short and simple sentences, often repeated over and over again. It is never too early to have back-and-forth chats with your baby. Talking to little ones introduces them to the world of voices, sounds and words and creates a strong foundation for learning how to communicate with others.

Source: "Speak Parentese, Not Baby Talk," <http://www.pbs.org/parents/child-development/baby-and-toddler/baby-talk-speaking-parentese/>.

Talk to Preschoolers! Language Development for School Readiness

As a parent and your child's first teacher, you spend thousands of hours in conversation with your child. This means you are in a wonderful position to observe, reflect upon and gather information about whether he is developing language skills appropriate for a 3- to 4-year old child. It's helpful to know what basic listening and speaking skills your child should be learning at this age. For example:

Listening skills – My child can...

- understand most of what is said and follow directions with at least two steps.
- understand direction words like "top," "bottom," "big," and "little."
- recognize when words rhyme.

Speaking skills – My child can...

- speak in complete sentences of four or more words.
- correctly name colors, people, objects, and categories of objects.
- Speak clearly enough that strangers can understand.
- use the pronouns "I," "you," and "me" correctly.

By understanding some of the language skills your child should have, you can reinforce those skills. It's

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If you have concerns about your child's growth and development, please talk to your child's health care provider or go to www.helpmegrowmn.org



Talk to Toddlers! Expand Their Language Skills

Early language acquisition is instinctive and for most children tends to happen quite naturally. Up until the toddler stage, your child has probably pointed, made eye contact, and used body language to give you messages. However, around 12 to 13 months, toddlers begin producing their first words. Eventually, they begin to string words together to make simple sentences. How we as adults respond to their attempts to communicate has an impact – accelerating or decelerating their language development.

There are many strategies you can use to support your child's language development at the toddler stage:

Join your child in imaginative play.

The time period when kids begin producing their first words, usually around 12 to 13 months, is also the same time that symbolic play begins. For example, a child holding a banana to her ear and pretending it is a phone. By joining your child in imaginative play, you are encouraging and helping to expand her new capacity to represent things mentally and symbolically.

Create opportunities that encourage kids to practice their communication skills. You can place some items such as snacks or toys just out of reach and encourage your child to ask for it in some way. Pretend to be forgetful during a routine you and your child have established. For example, purposely forget to put her socks on



before her shoes and let her catch you being forgetful.

Bring your child to the next level of language skill. For example, if your child communicates in one or two word bursts, model and use three and four word sentences. If your child is pointing to something, such as apple juice that she wants to drink, interpret what she is trying to say. Respond with, "Apple juice. You want apple juice."

Be sure to respond immediately to all of your child's attempts to communicate, including words and gestures. This shows kids how important communication is and gives you the opportunity to model more sophisticated language skills.

Source: "Helping Toddlers Expand Language Skills: Tips for Encouraging Kids Age 0-5 to Talk," by Rachel Cortese, MS, CCC-SLP, Child Mind Institute, <http://childmind.org/article/helping-toddlers-expand-their-language-skills/>.

Talk to Preschoolers! Language Development for School Readiness

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easy and fun to practice language skills with your child throughout the day. Here are some activities to try:

- Speak to your child in a clear, correct, and simple manner. Avoid using baby talk.
- Make conversation with your child a two-way street. Take time each day to listen to and talk with your child.
- When your child speaks to you, model good listening behavior. For example, pause an activity and make eye contact.
- Encourage your child to use language (not just gestures or actions) to express ideas, observations, and feelings.
- Ask questions that require your child to make and express a choice.
- Engage your child in activities and games that require listening and following directions.
- Read and tell stories that have interesting characters and easy-to-follow plots. Discuss the stories together.

Normal language development doesn't progress in exactly the same way for each child. However, if you have concerns, you should discuss them with your child's pediatrician.

Source: "Understanding Language Development in Preschoolers," by Kristin Stanberry, <http://www.getreadytoread.org/early-learning-childhood-basics/early-childhood/understanding-language-development-in-preschoolers>.