



18 months *to* 36 months

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT & LITERACY

How are children learning language?

Introduction

How does my child learn language?

- In the third year of life, most children are able to communicate their needs clearly through language using simple sentences and clearer pronunciation. They are learning vocabulary very fast and quickly use new words they hear you say. They can use language to talk about what has happened in the past and what they would like to do. With their clearer speech they have conversations with their friends and with people outside of their family.
- Conversations might sound like this:
 - Child: I like to go to the park. Remember we saw a dog at the park?
 - Parent: Yes, that dog followed you around and licked your hand.
 - Child: It tickled my hand. Can we go back to the park to see the dog?
- Many of the things that you already do with your child help him or her learn to speak. Family members naturally talk about what is happening right now with children. This helps children to associate words with the things and experiences they are having.



Bilingual Language Development

How do children in bilingual or non-English-speaking families learn language?

- Young children are very skilled at learning language and have the ability to learn two or more languages even before they begin school.
- Families who speak a language other than English at home can use their home language as their primary language with children. Learning their home language helps children feel connected to their family and culture. They can learn English at the same time if the family is bilingual or they can learn English when they begin childcare or school.
- Families support language learning by talking, reading and singing to their children in their home language. In this way children learn many language skills that will help them when they begin learning English.
- Check with your local library for books in your home language.
- Children who have this opportunity to become bilingual at an early age will benefit from the use of both languages throughout their lives.

Receptive Language

What is my child understanding?

“Receptive language” refers to all the words that children hear and understand. Children understand more words than they can speak.

- Listening to what you say to them helps them learn new words and build their vocabularies.
- Children listen to words that are spoken directly to them as well as to conversations that are happening around them.
- They also pay attention to the tone of language and understand the meaning of tone as well as words. For instance, they can notice when your tone is excited, loving, frustrated, or scared and are learning to use tone in their own conversations.
- Young children can understand 2-step requests: “Can you get a blanket to put on the baby?” “Please put your bowl in the dishwasher and get a wipe for your face.”



- Many of the things that you already do with your child help him or her learn to speak. Family members naturally talk with children about what is happening right now, what happened in the past and things that will happen soon. This helps children to associate words with the things and experiences they are having.

Expressive Language

Communication: Talking and reading

“Expressive language” includes all the sounds and words that a child makes.

- Young children have many words to communicate their feelings, needs and ideas and can be understood by friends and other people outside their families.
- They have begun to learn the rules of speech, but still make some mistakes. For example: “He goed to the store.” “There are two mans in the car.”
- Young children engage in short conversations and can talk about the past and the future.
- Young children use language in their play to share their ideas: “Baby go night-night.” “Here, daddy, I made cookies for dinner.”
- Young children are interested in books. They enjoy spending time reading a book with you or sitting by themselves turning the pages and telling parts of the story from their memory. They might also pretend to read the book to their dolls or stuffed animals.
- They watch you when you read, turn the pages, point to pictures, name things in the book and can sometimes tell you what is going to happen next.
- Young children like to sing and often know parts of songs that they sing while they are playing.



Here are some tips to support your child's language development and interest in reading:

- Talk to your child about what you are doing and going to do. Your child is more able to learn language when it is connected to something she is experiencing.

Your child is more able to learn language when it is connected to something she is experiencing.

- "I'm going to put these books away on the shelf. Can you hand those to me?"
- "I'm going to get my shoes to put on. Can you find yours?"
- "I made a salad for our lunch. I cut up cucumbers and tomatoes to put in it."
- When your child shows interest in something, offer words to describe what they are interested in. Your child is more interested in words that describe their interests.
 - "You are looking at that garbage truck. Can you see the part that picks up the garbage cans?"
 - "You just looked up at the sky. Did you hear the airplane flying by? The sound is getting softer. The plane must be far away now . . ."
 - "Every time we read this book, you go straight to the page with the caterpillar on it. That must be your favorite page. What do you like about the caterpillar?"
- Talk about what your child is doing. This is like "show and tell." At the same time your child is experiencing something, they are learning words to talk about it.
 - "You pushed the truck all the way up the hill and let it go. It went down the hill all by itself!"
 - "You are using the side of the crayon on the paper. Look how big the mark is."
- Talk about what you are doing. This is like "show and tell." At the same time your child is seeing something, they are learning words to talk about it.



- “I’m sending an email to Grammy to let her know we will pick her up at the bus station.”
- “I’m putting extra clothes in your backpack in case you need to change at school.”
- “I’m giving you 5 kisses. Let’s count them.”
- Use many descriptive words. This is a way that they build vocabulary.
 - “Your favorite blanket is green and blue and fuzzy and covered with stars.”
 - “There are so many vegetables on your rice. They are nutritious. They will help you grow strong and be healthy.”
- Talk about the near future. This gives children a chance to make a mental picture about what is going to happen before it happens.
 - “Soon it will be time to put on your shoes, coat and hat so we can catch our bus.”
 - “After this program is over, we will get our wagon so we can go to the store and get food for dinner.”
 - “Tomorrow morning, we are going to wake up early to make cupcakes for your sister’s birthday.”
- Talk about the recent past. This offers children a chance to develop a mental picture—a memory of what has happened.
 - “When Nana was here, she read you your favorite book and taught you a new song. Do you remember it?”
 - “When I said good-bye to you at school this morning you cried a little and then your teacher told me you played with the play dough.”
 - “You went to play at your friend Tori’s house last week. She is coming to our house to play this afternoon.”
- Have books available for your child. Providing books for your child teaches that you value books and reading.
 - Trips to the library provide a fun outing and give you a large collection of books to share with your child.
- Read books to your child. Early reading experiences help children learn that books hold stories, words, and information for them.



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- Take your time reading books. Often children have questions or ideas they want to talk about during the story.
- Ask your child questions about the story. “What do you think is going to happen next? What part of the story did you like the best?”
- You can also show your child where the title is and tell them the name of the person who wrote the book.
- This early experience with books can start a lifetime love of reading for our children.
- Talk about pictures and books with your child. Learning that pictures represent things is the first step to learning that letters can also represent things.
 - “I see stars in the sky. What do you see?”
 - “What do you notice in this picture?” (When your child points, you can name what they are pointing to, if they don't.)
- Share photos with your child and talk about them too.
 - “Here is a photo of your abuelita and your tia.”
 - “This is a photo of when you were a baby! You are so much bigger now.”
- You can make simple books for your child using photos of people and things they love. These books help them see that books can represent things that they know about.
 - You can glue photos on paper, write words for your story, and staple, tie or tape the pages together.
 - Stories don't have to be long. They can just be a few pages. “Dhruv likes to build with blocks. He starts with a few blocks stacked. Soon he has a tall tower. Sometimes it falls down and he starts to build it again.”

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