

Writing Samples

Originally composed for Helium.com; factual but a bit more conversational in tone

Child Development 0-18 mos: What You Can Do to Help Your Little One Start Talking

<http://www.helium.com/items/2034454-encourage-language-development>

At this stage of the game, your little one is just beginning to experience the world, period. Every day is full of hundreds of new sights, sounds, people, and emotions. Your child will best develop language skills in an environment that is encouraging and interactive, with plenty of support from you.

Association is the main psychological idea that will most benefit your child's language development. Your baby needs to be able to associate words with his or her experiences, and there are many ways you can shape your daily interaction with your child to inspire this.

- **Talk to your baby about his or her experiences while they are happening.**

This may seem obvious, but you may be surprised at how easily we can overlook the opportunity of talking to our children during every day activities, such as changing, feeding, bathing, or holding them. In reality, these are fundamental formative experiences that shape your child's daily routine: "Are you hungry? Okay, here's some milk," "Bath time!" or "Let's pick out a pretty shirt for you today." Talk about what you are doing, who you will see together, etc. Use gestures, such as waving goodbye or hello. Talking to your child during these activities will help him or her associate the proper words and tones with the experience itself, and these everyday routines will become some of the first that he or she learns to talk about and navigate.

- **Use short, simple sentences and emphasize words. Read to your child.**

"Roll the ball now!", "That's a big dog!" or "See the red triiiiaangle." Vowel sounds are important here, so encourage your child to make them (e.g., "ma," "ba," "da"). This way you are helping your child learn what words are associated with what objects at a level that is accessible to him or her. In the same vein, read to your child books especially designed for infants, and focus on helping him master those words by pointing to shapes, colors, and objects as you read about them. Play naming games (ask, "What's this?") and encourage your child to proactively point to familiar objects that he or she has learned about.

- **Teach your baby to imitate you and your actions.**

Play hand games patty cake or itsy-bitsy-spider and encourage your child to imitate. You can also help by imitating *their* facial expressions, laughter, etc. This reinforces your position as the role model in their life, rather than someone who is distant, and they will more naturally imitate you in other everyday aspects of life if you establish this relationship with them. ...

- **Encourage your child's attempts to communicate.**

They may not be using words and sentences yet, but believe it or not, when your children coo or make babytalk, they truly believe they are talking to you! Ignoring these attempts to reach out to you can discourage and frustrate your child. Instead, reach back to your child - "Well hello to you too!" or "I love you too!" - and encourage communication. Make eye contact, use different tonal patterns and emphasize different words and sentences depending on what your child is trying to say. This is essential not just for language development, but for a healthy and loving relationship with your child in general.

(clipped for brevity)