

How to Talk to Your Young Child

From the moment they are born, parents begin talking to their babies. The suggestion to “talk to your baby” seems almost unnecessary as parents seem programmed to do this right from the start! But how often you interact with your child and the way you interact with your child can make a huge difference. By following these five simple guidelines, you will set your young child on the path towards language learning:

- **Be face-to-face** – one of the best ways to let your child know that you want to talk to him is to be face-to-face. This means joining your child at his physical level, whether that’s on the floor together, facing him in his high chair, or sitting together at the table. Make eye contact with your child and let him know that you are listening and interested.
- **It takes TWO to talk** – Talking with your child doesn’t mean that you should do all of the talking! Pause and wait for your child to send you messages. And when it’s your turn to talk, talk about what interests your child. By following your child’s lead, you let him know that you are interested in what he has to say, which will make him want to have longer conversations with you.
- **Use simple, grammatical sentences** – Young children benefit from hearing proper sentences (like “give it to Mommy” or “do you want a cookie?”), as opposed to sentences that have missing words (like “ta ta Mommy” or “baby want cookie?”). The grammar in sentences helps young children figure out what the words mean and how they are used together.
- **Use your voice, face, and hands** – Gesturing with your hands and face (such as pointing, shrugging your shoulders, or frowning) helps young children understand the meaning of your words. And your voice can also help with word meanings – such as making your voice rise upwards as you say the word “up”.
- **Any time is conversation time!** – You don’t need special toys or activities to encourage your child’s language. You can have conversations at the grocery store about what you need to buy and pick out food together. You can talk about what you see as you go for a walk around the neighbourhood. And bath time is a great time for conversation! Spending time talking about your child’s interests throughout the day is what makes a difference.

By allowing your child to lead and talking about his interests, you will have many opportunities to provide your child with good language models. And your child will get the message that you are an interested conversation partner. These interactions will help your child tune-in to words, and promote his vocabulary and overall language development.