

Language Development and Communication

Infants and toddlers often understand much more than they are able to say. During their first three years, they learn the meaning of many words, signs, and other forms of communication. Infants and toddlers express their needs, wants, and feelings through crying, gesturing, moving, looking, making marks with crayons, and talking. They build early literacy by exploring books, listening to songs and nursery rhymes, hearing stories, drawing and scribbling.

Adults build nurturing relationships with infants and toddlers by watching, listening, and responding consistently to their communications. Caregivers form and maintain these relationships when they hold, massage, talk, read and sing with babies and toddlers. They can learn to understand and respond to even the youngest baby's cues through touch and massage.

Young children begin to understand and use language as part of these nurturing relationships. They must have live models. Television and "educational" electronic games are no substitute for conversations with caring adults. The foundations of reading and writing begin in infancy when adults talk and read to children. Infants and toddlers learn to value reading and writing when they see adults using these skills in everyday life.

Many families speak languages other than English at home. Infants and toddlers need to continue learning and speaking their family's language as they learn English. This helps them to stay close to all of the important people in their lives. It will also help them understand concepts and learn to read in the future. Books and print in their family's language and from their culture are especially important.

Adults may also need to use sign language and gestures to help children understand language. Sign language gives infants and toddlers a way to communicate before they can talk. It enhances language development and decreases frustration.

Some infants and toddlers use assistive listening devices to help them hear. These devices allow them to learn the sounds and words that make up language. Caregivers can learn the skills to help these children attend to and use spoken language. Family members can explain how to use the assistive devices their infants and toddlers use for hearing.

Receptive Language

Expressive Language

Early Literacy



Receptive Language (Hearing/Listening/Understanding)

Infants and toddlers learn the sounds of words and ways to use the words of their family's and caregiver's language(s) when adults talk, read, and sing with them.



What to Look For

Infants may begin to:

- 👂 Respond in many ways (move, startle, and coo) to sounds, toys, and music.
- 👂 Respond to voices (smile, coo, babble).
- 👂 Recognize familiar voices and become quiet if crying.
- 👂 Gaze at faces.
- 👂 Pay brief attention to the same object the caregiver is looking at.
- 👂 Understand differences in tones of voices.
- 👂 Recognize spoken or signed words for common items.

- 👂 Respond to simple requests (“Where are your shoes?” “Can you show me the puppy?”).

- 👂 Respond to their names (older infants).

Young Toddlers may begin to:

- 👂 Follow the caregiver's gaze to look at the same objects or people.
- 👂 Understand simple, frequently used words, sentences and questions.
- 👂 Follow simple directions (“Put your pillow on the bed.” “Please sit by me.”).
- 👂 Respond to comments and questions about pictures, play, people, and things that are happening right now.

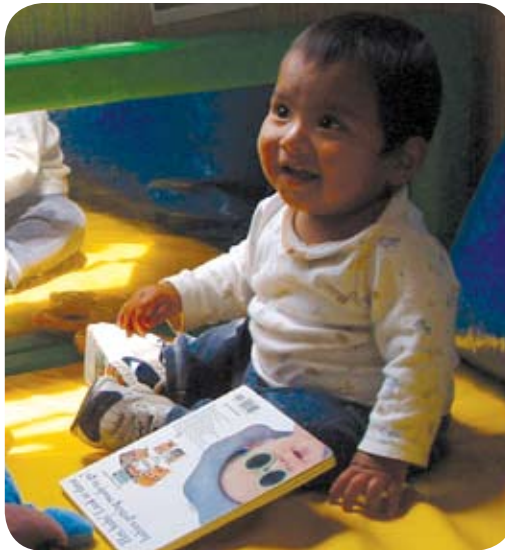
Older Toddlers may begin to:

- 👤 Understand many new vocabulary words and a variety of concepts (big and little, in and out).
- 👤 Understand and respond to gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice and some words that show strong emotions.
- 👤 Respond to more complex questions (“What is she doing?” “What happened to the bear in the story?”).
- 👤 Follow two-step directions (“Pick up the paper and put it in the trash.” “Get your cup and put it on the table.”).

What to Do

- ✓ Listen to, watch, talk to and play with infants and toddlers at their eye level.
- ✓ Hold babies making sure they can see or feel your mouth. Then, make sounds, or repeat the sounds babies make.
- ✓ Respond to infants when they look at you, cry, smile, coo, say words, and reach or move toward you. Talk to them, pick them up, and imitate their sounds back to them.
- ✓ Have fun making sounds and talking with infants and toddlers! Show them you enjoy these conversations.
- ✓ Smile big, make silly faces, use high and low voices, and hug infants and toddlers. Use many hand gestures and sign language appropriate for infants and toddlers, like waving your hand when saying, “Come here.”
- ✓ Play turn-taking games: make a sound and wait for the infant or toddler to make a sound before your next turn.
- ✓ Take infants and toddlers outdoors to listen to different sounds. Point out the sounds by saying things like, “Hear the fire truck!” or “Listen to the buzzing bees!”
- ✓ Learn to say at least a few words to children in their family’s language. Learn greetings, words for favorite people and things, and words or phrases for common events and routines.
- ✓ Play audio recordings of family members’ voices in their own language for infants and toddlers to hear. This will help infants and toddlers feel connected to their families.
- ✓ Use a variety of words when you talk, including labels for things, action words, and many descriptive words. (“Look at the squirrel with the long, fluffy tail! It is running and jumping all over the yard.”)

- ✓ Describe what you are doing, and what infants and toddlers are doing. (“I’m putting lunch in the oven right now. I can see you are all ready because you are waiting for me at the table.”)
- ✓ Label infants’ and toddlers’ emotions without judging them as good or bad. (“Oh, you are crying. You seem to be sad because Daddy has gone to work.”)



- ✓ When you speak, make your tone and facial expression match what you are saying. (For example, use a serious tone and don’t smile when saying, “We don’t hit our friends. Hitting hurts.”)
- ✓ Share positive stories about your childhood experiences. Talk about other family memories and experiences.
- ✓ Read and talk about books with infants and toddlers. Comment about the things that interest them in the books and ask simple questions about what they see.

Expressive Language (Talking/Communicating)

Infants and toddlers express their wants, needs, and feelings in many ways including speech, gestures, sign language, pointing to pictures and using communication devices. As they practice communicating with others, they begin using more words and longer sentences to express more complex ideas.



What to Look For

Infants may begin to:

- 👶 Make different sounds for different purposes (whimper when wet, cry loudly when hungry).
- 👶 Smile, coo, wiggle, squeal or laugh to show pleasure when they see a familiar person.
- 👶 Look toward adults for attention and look away when they are tired or over-stimulated.
- 👶 Engage in vocal play such as babbling and turn-taking with adults and other children.
- 👶 Imitate sounds, words, and gestures.
- 👶 Use gestures, sounds, signs and assistive technology to express wants and needs.
- 👶 Make specific sounds for certain people and objects.
- 👶 Repeat actions that mean something specific (lift arms to be picked up, point at desired toys).

Young Toddlers may begin to:

- 👶 Look, point, talk, or bring objects to caregivers to communicate.
- 👶 Establish joint attention by looking at an object, at their caregiver, and back at the object.
- 👶 Express emotions through facial expressions and body movements.
- 👶 Wave “hi” and “bye.”
- 👶 Use a few words to talk about themselves, name family members and pets, say simple sentences, make requests and ask questions.
- 👶 Try to have a conversation.
- 👶 Use many different consonant sounds at the beginning of words.
- 👶 “Jabber” and pretend to talk using adult-like speech patterns and tones like their family’s language.
- 👶 Attempt to sing along with music.

Older Toddlers may begin to:

- 🗣️ Acquire and use many new words each day and have a word for almost everything.
- 🗣️ Use two or three word “sentences” to talk about themselves.
- 🗣️ Use two or three words to talk to themselves and others about things they are “working on,” things they are doing, routines and events of the day.
- 🗣️ Use two or three words to ask for people, actions, objects, and pets.
- 🗣️ Answer simple questions.
- 🗣️ Use gestures and some words to express emotions (“Me do it” to show confidence, hugging and laughing to show affection, “No! mine!” when other child grabs toy).
- 🗣️ Use speech that is understood most of the time by familiar listeners; show frustration, often through their behavior, if not understood.
- 🗣️ Use “no” to mean they do not want to do something or they do not want something.
- 🗣️ Use language for simple pretend play (“He eat.” when feeding a toy baby with a spoon, “Now go work.” after putting on shoes and necktie).
- 🗣️ Carry on conversations about the same topic for three or four turns.
- 🗣️ Show interest in talking about past events, especially when the caregiver uses familiar words, objects and gestures.
- 🗣️ Sing simple phrases of songs.

What to Do

- ✔️ Imitate and repeat the child’s motions, sounds, and attempts at words in different languages and in a positive and encouraging manner.
- ✔️ Recognize that young infants do not cry or act out in order to be naughty or to make you angry. They are simply learning to communicate their wants and needs.
- ✔️ Realize that toddler behaviors such as biting or tantrums may happen because they do not yet have the words to communicate. They may be overwhelmed by learning so many new things. Help toddlers to calm down and give them words for their feelings. (“You seem to be mad that Joe has the toy you want. Let’s find another toy.”)
- ✔️ Take turns with infants and toddlers through talking, actions, and playing games like “peek-a-boo” or other communication games from their culture.

- ✔️ Encourage children to try out new sounds and words, including words in different languages.
- ✔️ Encourage conversations while playing or looking at books by using the strategy known as the CAR (Comment-Ask-Respond, Notari-Syverson, Maddox & Cole, 1999).
 - * **Comment** on what an infant or toddler is interested in, such as a picture he may be looking at or a toy she may be playing with. WAIT at least five seconds before continuing with the next step.
 - * **Ask** a question about whatever the infant or toddler is interested in. WAIT at least five seconds. Ask a variety of questions at different times about what the child is interested in. Include questions that require a simple one-word answer (such as “What does a doggy say?”) and questions that require a longer answer (such as “What do you think might happen?”)
 - * **Respond** by adding a little more information about the child’s interest. For example, if a child says, “Doggy bark,” a caregiver might say, “Yes, a doggy barks and wags its tail.”



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- ✔️ Talk with all infants and toddlers in positive ways about what they are hearing, seeing, feeling, smelling, and tasting. Talk about printed words they see related to these experiences. Talk with them about their experiences both indoors and outdoors.
- ✔️ Encourage older toddlers to talk about, “draw” or “scribble”, and act out what they see.
- ✔️ Be an appropriate language model by using correct grammar and a variety of different words. Show infants and toddlers how to participate in conversations by having many conversations with them and with other children and adults.
- ✔️ Sing songs, say rhymes, and do finger plays with infants and toddlers in different languages.

Real World Stories

Jae-Yoon and Sam, like all of their classmates in the young toddler room, love drums. It all started with a favorite book, *Pots and Pans*. First, the toddlers enjoyed pounding and tapping on the pots and pans in the home center. Then, the sturdy drums on the music shelf became popular. The toddlers bang on one drum or pot and then another with their hands or with blocks, listening to the different sounds. The teachers have hung pictures of drums all around the room at the toddlers' eye level. The pictures show adults and children from around the world playing all kinds of drums. Sam likes the picture of the goblet-shaped Djembe drum from West Africa.

Today is a special day because several family members have brought drums from home. The visitors arrive and sit on the rug in the middle of the room. Jae-Yoon is the first to notice the new drums. She hurries over to try the bongo drums. Eduardo's father shows her how to tap one drum and then the other. She copies him, listening to the high and low pitches. There is a Bera drum from Sri Lanka, a Native American drum with a deerskin top, and to Sam's delight, a big Djembe drum. He moves back and forth between the Djembe drum and the picture, pointing and jabbering with excitement. "Yes, that's a real Djembe drum, just like the one in the picture!" exclaims the teacher.


Each visitor has a chance to play his or her drum. Most of the toddlers cluster around to listen, and some move in time to the beat. The teachers allow the toddlers to join the drumming activity or to play in other parts of the room. The teachers also take many pictures. These pictures will be made into laminated books for the toddlers to look at later.

A book was the starting point for these toddlers' interest in drums. Teachers followed up on this interest by adding new musical instruments



and pictures to the classroom. These materials encourage toddlers to recognize and label things, communicate, and express themselves creatively. Sam communicates his excitement upon seeing a drum like the one in the picture. The teacher shares his enthusiasm and adds words for what is happening. This encourages Sam to communicate further.

The visit from families takes the toddlers' exploration of drums to a new level. Family members get to share something that interests them and this helps them feel connected to their child's classroom. The visit from family members, like the pictures on the wall, introduces cultural diversity in a natural way. Toddlers develop positive feelings about a variety of people who play different kinds of drums. The teachers help the toddlers remember and learn even more by making books about this special event.

 EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE (TALKING AND COMMUNICATING) and EARLY LITERACY

 IMAGINATION, CREATIVITY AND INVENTION, WONDER AND DELIGHT

 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Early Literacy

The foundations of reading and writing – literacy – begin in infancy. Infants and toddlers explore books, listen to songs and nursery rhymes, hear stories, draw and scribble as they build their early literacy abilities.



What to Look For

Infants may begin to:

- 👶 Explore books and paper by tasting, mouthing, crumpling, banging, and patting.
- 👶 Listen to simple and repetitive books, stories, and songs in different languages.
- 👶 Take turns with caregivers making facial expressions and sounds in different languages.
- 👶 Look at pictures of faces and other simple objects.
- 👶 Make appropriate sounds when looking at pictures. (“Ack, ack” when looking at a duck, “Vrrrrrooom” when looking at car.)

Young toddlers may begin to:

- 👶 Show an increasing interest in books.
- 👶 Turn pages, point to, and label pictures in books. They may treat pictures as real (licking a picture of ice cream, rubbing “fur” of a cat in a book).
- 👶 Listen to and repeat simple and repetitive books, stories, songs, and finger plays in different languages.
- 👶 Carry books around, “name” them, and select books for adults to read out loud.
- 👶 Recognize some environmental print and logos (the golden arches for McDonald’s, their favorite cereal box, a sign for a store they go to often).

- 👤 Make marks, meaningful marks, “draw” and scribble (cover easel paper with big crayon marks, hold phone to ear and make marks with pencil, scribble on paper while sitting with caregiver who is writing).

Older toddlers may begin to:

- 👤 Listen for longer periods of time to books, stories, songs and finger plays in different languages.
- 👤 Participate in rhyming games and notice sounds that are the same and different.
- 👤 Hold a book upright, turn pages appropriately most of the time, shut book and say “done” or “the end.”
- 👤 Chime in on a repeated line in a book while being read to by adult.
- 👤 Pretend to read familiar books from memory; repeat familiar phrases while looking at a book.
- 👤 Answer simple questions about stories.
- 👤 Show they understand the need for and the uses of print (scribble a “grocery list” during play, say “There what they have” when looking at a menu).
- 👤 Enjoy storybooks and storytelling in different languages.
- 👤 Understand the meaning of realistic symbols such as photographs, and later abstract symbols such as signs and print (know which pictures stand for which activities on a daily schedule, says “Sign say railroad tracks.”).

What to Do

- ✔ Provide daily lap reading time.
- ✔ Read and share books with small groups of infants and toddlers every day. Look at and talk about pictures and read simple stories. Choose books about things infants and toddlers are interested in (families, pets, trees, flowers).
- ✔ Include books that show children with disabilities in a natural way as part of the stories and pictures.
- ✔ Give infants and toddlers access to books throughout the day. Provide books that children can put in their mouths and books with pages that turn easily, such as cloth and board books.
- ✔ Place clear pictures of children and everyday objects throughout the room. Talk and sing about pictures in books and in the room.
- ✔ Make books using pictures of family members and other familiar objects found in magazines, catalogs and environmental print (such as pictures from catalog cut-outs and labels from favorite foods). Make books of trips, events you have shared, and children’s art.
- ✔ Share nursery rhymes, sing songs, and read simple poems in different languages.
- ✔ Make stories come alive by using different voices and body movements.
- ✔ Ask simple questions and make comments about books to start conversations with children. Talk about similar things that young children may have experienced. (“Do you have a pet?” “What did you see at the zoo?”). Welcome and encourage children’s questions too!
- ✔ Help children tell stories and act out parts of stories they have heard using words, pictures, movement, puppets, and toys.
- ✔ Place appealing books, signs, and posters in all interest areas indoors and outdoors at children’s eye level.
- ✔ Point out words in books and in the environment (street signs, toy boxes, words on pictures in room).
- ✔ Model respect for books and help children care for books.
- ✔ Provide crayons and other art materials for infants and toddlers to explore. Adapt art materials if needed so children with disabilities can use them.
- ✔ Model the use of reading, writing and drawing in everyday activities.
- ✔ Bring books, paper, and writing/drawing tools outside for children to use and enjoy.
- ✔ Make sure that children often see their name in writing, such as on their cubby/personal space, on all personal belongings, and on their artwork or other creations if they wish.
- ✔ For older toddlers, point out a few familiar letters such as the first letter in a child’s name and call attention to them occasionally. If a child asks for a letter name, provide it. DO NOT drill toddlers on reciting the alphabet or naming letters.

Real World Stories

It is a busy morning in Mr. McDowell's two-year-old classroom. Springtime is approaching. Most of the children in this group are close to three years old. Mr. McDowell takes out a book he has made using pictures of their class's first field trip. Their visit to a Mexican restaurant was a big success.

Miguel and Diana, whose parents work at the restaurant, ask to look at the book. "Let's read it together," suggests Mr. McDowell. He sits down on the rug with the toddlers. Several other toddlers hurry over to join them.

Each page of the book shows an event from the field trip. A simple sentence is written in both English and Spanish under each picture. Diana's mother helped translate the sentences into Spanish. Mr. McDowell reads each page and pauses for the children to talk about the pictures. Soon they reach a page showing Miguel's mother working in the restaurant kitchen. Miguel exclaims, "Mi mama!"

"Yes, there is your mother. Tu madre," agrees Mr. McDowell. He pauses to see if Miguel will say more. After a few moments, he asks, "What is your mother doing? ¿Que esta haciendo tu mama?"

"¡Cocinando!" says Miguel.

Mr. McDowell again waits for Miguel to say more. When he does not, the teacher adds, "Si, cocinando. She cooked tacos and burritos for all of us. And then we ate them! Los comimos." The children point excitedly at the next page. It shows the class eating together at the restaurant with several family members. "There me and Tyler!" "¡Estamos comiendo!" "There my daddy!"

Later in the morning, the dramatic play center becomes a restaurant kitchen. The field trip book is displayed on a shelf. It is open to the page showing Miguel's mother. Several children are patting play dough into flat round shapes, and a large empty box serves as an oven. "Yo hago tortillas como mama," explains Diana proudly. ("I make tortillas like Mama.")

In this example, Mr. McDowell uses experiences from everyday life to help older toddlers learn. He worked with



the families to arrange a field trip that was fun for children and showed the work parents do. The teacher-made book helps the children remember the trip. It also increases their interest in books because it is about them and their families. By using both Spanish and English words, Mr. McDowell builds the early literacy of all children in the class.

The toddlers are obviously very interested in the book. They show what they have learned by talking about it and pretending to cook tortillas in a restaurant.

Mr. McDowell also promotes early literacy and learning when he reads the book and talks about it with the toddlers. He reads with a small group of toddlers and stops to let them talk about the words and pictures.

The teacher uses the CAR strategy – Comment, Ask, Respond – (Notari-Syverson, Maddox, & Cole, 1999) to encourage Miguel to talk more about the book and help him learn. Mr. McDowell has learned enough Spanish to speak key words and phrases in the children's language. This helps them develop strong language skills in both English and Spanish.

- 🗣️ EARLY LITERACY and EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE (TALKING AND COMMUNICATING)
- ♥️ DEVELOPING A SENSE OF SELF WITH OTHERS
- 👤 SOCIAL CONNECTIONS and CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT AND MEMORY

