

Family Focus

Building a Foundation for School Success

Getting Ready for School

Talking with Your Child Every Day

Good communication skills are important for your child to be able to express what she or he needs, wants, thinks and feels. Talking with your child in any language helps your child develop good speaking, listening, and early literacy skills. It also strengthens your parent-child relationship.

Why is this important for school readiness?

Research shows that talking with (not just to) your child creates measurable changes in the brain and sets the stage for strong literacy skills in school. These interactions are even more important than the number of words your child hears.

Talking with your child can help your child learn to listen to others and take turns in conversations

A language rich environment at home is important for your child's language development. A language rich environment is one where family members frequently talk, read or sing with the child in English and/or a family's home language.

The more words children hear and know helps them understand conversations and understand books. By third grade, children who know more words and have bigger vocabularies tend to become stronger readers.

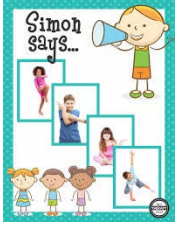
"Private speech" is the kind of talking children (and adults) do when they talk to themselves. Private speech is an important part of preschoolers' language development. It helps them practice unfamiliar kinds of language, reinforces ideas they are trying to remember, and helps them with problem-solving and self-control.

What can families do to help?

- ❖ Set aside time to converse with your child about something that interests him or her. Sit with your child and make eye contact.
- ❖ When conversing with your child, pause after speaking to give your child enough time to continue the conversation. If your family is multilingual, use any language to speak with your child.
- ❖ Talk with your child during routines: while he or she is getting dressed, getting ready for bed, and while in the bath tub.
- ❖ Use new and interesting words with your child. For example, when you are talking about something that's "big", substitute other words for big such as "huge" or "gigantic".
- ❖ Be an active listener when your child speaks with you. Repeat back what your child said to let him or her know you were listening.
- ❖ Talk with your child about his or her feelings, what makes your child mad, sad, frustrated, or angry.
- ❖ Ask your child questions to get him or her talking. Questions like: "What are you doing? Who did you play with at school?" Remember to give your child enough time to respond to what you are asking.
- ❖ Narrate everyday chores as you do them. For example, "I need to separate the dark and light colors before washing them."
- ❖ Take advantage of daily activities to foster conversations such as going to the grocery store to discuss what you will buy, how many, and what you're going to make. Discuss size, shape and weight of items.

Activities to do with your preschooler:

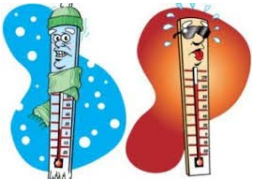
- ❖ Help develop your child’s listening-comprehension skills: **Play “Simon Says” or “Mother, May I”**



Playing classical games like **Mother, May I?** or **Simon Says** is a fun way to help develop your child’s listening-comprehension skills. You probably played these when you were a child. Give simple commands such as, “Stand on one foot,” “Touch your nose,” or “Clap your hands”. Take turns being the leader.



- ❖ Increase your child’s vocabulary: **Play the “Hot and Cold Game”**



Choose one of your child’s favorite toys and hide it while he or she is in another room. Ask your child to come and try to find the toy. When your child goes in the wrong direction, cross your arms, shiver, and say, “Brr, you’re getting cold.” When he or she goes in the right direction, fan your face and say, “You’re getting warmer.” Continue until your child finds the toy. Repeat, or try reversing the roles and having your child hide a toy for you to find.



- ❖ Encourage storytelling to expand language and sequential thinking: **Play “Family Story Time”**



One person starts by making up a story and the next person continues the story. For example, “Once upon a time there was a sad dragon.” Let your child chime in whenever he or she wants to continue the story. Help your child think of something to add to the story by asking questions such as, “Why was the dragon sad? Where did the dragon live?”.



- ❖ Record your child telling a story or singing: **A Star is Born!**

Use your smart phone to record your child telling a story or singing a song, and then play it back to your child. Most children enjoy being on camera, so recording your child telling a story or singing a song will motivate her or him to use language. Grandparents will love watching the recording too!



- ❖ **Play “What Rhymes With...”**



Say a word and ask your child to respond with a word that rhymes. For example, say “bat” and the child responds with “cat” or “fat”. Let your child start the game by saying a word, and then you respond with a rhyming word. Made-up words are okay as long as they rhyme. (Dr. Seuss used made-up rhyming words all the time!) This is a good game to play when waiting at the doctor’s office or riding in a car.



- ❖ Help your child use language to explain: **Do It Like This**

Encourage your child to give directions that you follow. For example, ask for him or her to explain how to build a garage out of blocks, make an ice cream cone, or throw a ball. Follow the directions exactly as given!



Resources used for this tip sheet:

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (2008). Activities to Encourage Speech and Language Development

Center for Early Literacy Learning (2012-2016). Practice Guides to Use with Parents: Talking and Listening

Walsh, B. (2018) The Brain-Changing Power of Conversation. Center for the Developing Child, Harvard University

<https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/18/02/brain-changing-power-conversation>

