



Learning to Grow

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII ♥ WINDWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Supporting Children's Language and Literacy Development

Have you ever wondered how you learned to talk? Did it just magically happen one day, or were there things that you experienced as a young child that led to your first utterance? Language specialists agree that there are important experiences that need to occur before a young child is ready to say her first word. Furthermore, these early experiences form the foundation not only for language development (the ability to talk and listen), but also for supporting the development of children's early literacy skills (the ability to read and write). Although the human brain is capable of growing and learning throughout life, the first three years of life is the most intensive period for language acquisition.

So what are these early experiences that we should be providing for young children? One of the most important things we can do is simply talk to them. In his book, *Brain Rules for Baby*, brain scientist John Medina tells us that research indicate that children whose parents talked positively, richly, and regularly to them, knew twice as many words as those whose parents

did not. When these children entered the school system, their reading, spelling, and writing abilities soared above those of children from less verbal households.

From their earliest moments of life, children need to have caring adults interacting and speaking with them. They need to hear our voices— not a television, DVD or the internet. Those things cannot take the place of a real live person engaging in a conversation with them.

In this newsletter, we will offer tips for communicating with young children and identify the kinds of interactions and language experiences that support their language and literacy development.

In This Newsletter:

To support you in fostering your child's healthy development and school readiness, this newsletter includes:

- ♥ **Age-specific information and suggestions** about activities to do with your infant, toddler, or preschooler,
- ♥ **Featured activities** for each age group,
- ♥ **How This Helps:** a summary of your child's development by doing these activities together,
- ♥ **Community Resources:** for more information about this topic, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.



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Infants

Communication with your child begins before she is born. She has heard Mom's and Dad's sounds while still developing in utero during pregnancy. At birth, she already recognizes and responds to her parents' voices, and loves hearing them. Hearing language is how she learns it. Long before your baby understands the meaning of words, she learns how powerful her language is, as people respond to her laughter and cries. Your child is beginning to learn how to use language to communicate with others.

Infants typically communicate by:

- ♥ **"cooing"** (a quiet, repetitive sound) sometime during the first few months of life,
- ♥ **"babbling"** (repetitive syllables "da da da") 6 months of age, and
- ♥ **using a few simple words** by the end of her first year.

To assist your infant's language development:

- ♥ **Talk to her every day.** Talk about the everyday things you're doing and seeing together. For example, "Let's get the wash now," "Look at the red bird" or "Yum, what a nice lunch we're having."

- ♥ **Engage in your infant's attempts at language.** Look at her, copy the sounds she makes, imitate her laughter and facial expressions. It encourages her to do more of it. Reward her language attempts with heightened attention.
- ♥ **Speak in "parentese."** Parentese is characterized by a high-pitched tone, a sing-song voice with stretched out vowels. Such as "How's da-a-a-ady's girl?"



Activity for Infants: *Read, Read, Read*

Materials:

Cloth or board books with sturdy pages that have simple and bright, colorful pictures

What to Do:

1. While reading, talk about and point to each picture. For example, "This dolphin is big. This mynah bird is small."
2. Encourage her to participate. Let your baby touch the books and point to pictures.
3. Ask questions like "What does the dog say?" Then follow with a simple answer: "The dog says, 'Bow wow.'"
4. Remember that most young babies can pay attention for only a few seconds! It's OK to stop when she loses interest. Babies will mouth and chew on books and that's okay!



(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)

Toddlers

Language explodes during the toddler years, with children learning and acquiring new words almost daily. Although every toddler develops language at their own pace, most of them are very alert to the people around them and pick up on the language they hear. Pronunciation is still not perfect, and speech may be mumbled and hard to understand, but that's okay!

Toddlers typically can communicate by:

- ♥ Saying about 8 – 10 words around 18 months of age
- ♥ Understanding two-part commands (e.g., “Go to your room and get your toy.”)
- ♥ Making simple sentences such as “more milk” by 2 years of age
- ♥ Using more complex sentences to respond to questions between 2-3 years of age.

To assist your toddler's language development:

- ♥ Ask questions that require more than a yes or no answer (for example, “What do you think will happen next?”)



- ♥ Introduce new vocabulary words. During playtime or everyday routines, use rare or uncommon words. For example “I have a big *appetite*. I am eating a lot of food today!” or talk about the *colander* in the kitchen and *velcro* on your shoes.
- ♥ When reading to your toddler, encourage her to hold the book and turn the pages. This will help her start to understand how a book is held and that pages are always turned in the same direction.

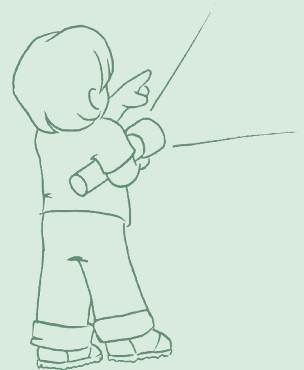
Activity for Toddlers: *Flashlight Search*

Materials:

A flashlight

Materials:

1. Shine a flashlight on different parts of the room, such as the wall, the door, or the floor and name them. For example, “This is the wall.” “This is the door.”
2. Ask your toddler to shine the flashlight on objects and tell you their names.
3. Give her simple directions. For example, “Shine the light on the ceiling. Now shine the light on the window.” Praise her when she finds the right object.
4. Talk about what happens when you push the flashlight switch “on” and “off.”



⚠ Safety Alert: Caution your child not to shine the flashlight in his eyes or anyone else's. The bright light might hurt the eyes.

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)

Preschoolers

The preschool years are a time of continued rapid growth in language skills. You will notice that your child's sentences will begin to have grammatical structure and will include a richer vocabulary.

You may notice that your preschooler's language is becoming easier to understand. She may be:

- ♥ Asking a lot of questions,
- ♥ Using pronouns and plurals correctly,
- ♥ Speaking in 5 – 6 word sentences, and
- ♥ Using more descriptive words when trying to tell a story (color, size, texture, shape of things).



To assist your preschooler's language development, extend and deepen your conversations and interactions with her by using the following tips (adapted from NAEYC's *Spotlight on Young Children and Language*):

- ♥ **Relate present experience to past experience.** For example, "This looks like the shell we saw on the beach by Tutu's house. Do you remember that shell?"
- ♥ **Give reasons for what is happening.** For example, "The potato gets soft when we cook it in the oven because the heat from the oven causes it to change."
- ♥ **Talk about feelings.** For example, "I was disappointed when it rained today and we couldn't go to the beach. Were you disappointed too?"

Activity for Preschoolers: Acting out a Favorite Story

Adapted from: *Pearson Early Learning Preschool Activity Cards*

Materials:

- Child's favorite storybook
- Props (optional)

What to Do:

1. Read your child's favorite story to her.
2. After reading the story, go back to the beginning and go through the book one page at a time, inviting her to retell the story to you. Prompt her with questions to fill in important information about the plot such as, "Who was outside the house?" "Why did the pig run away?" (The Three Little Pigs). Talk about what happened first, next, last.
3. Invite her to act out the story with you. Plan who will play which role and if you will use props. Have fun!

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)



How This Helps

The activities suggested in this newsletter help promote many different aspects of development:

Physical Development

- ♥ Use and strengthen small muscles, e.g., facial muscles, fingers, hands, and toes
- ♥ Learn through her senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching

Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Develop a close bond with you
- ♥ Learn to cooperate with others

Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Connect words and sounds she hears with what she experiences
- ♥ Build verbal skills, vocabulary, and use of descriptive language
- ♥ Develop an interest in books and an enjoyment of reading

Cognitive Development

- ♥ Develop her creativity and imagination
- ♥ Increase comprehension

Kids in the Kitchen

Cooking teaches valuable lessons. Children learn basic math concepts and skills as they help measure or add ingredients in sequence. They learn scientific concepts as they observe the changes that take place through cooking. Children also learn about their own taste preferences as they experiment with different foods.

As you make this recipe with your child, show her how to safely handle the items and allow her to do as much as she is capable of. Ask questions throughout the process to encourage her language and thinking skills.

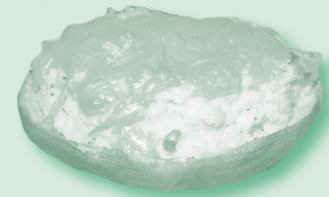
Put-Back Potatoes

Adapted from Kids Cooking

What you will need:

- Potatoes (as many as you like)
- Cooking oil
- 2 Tbs. of milk for each potato
- 3 Tbs. of grated cheddar cheese for each potato

- Salt and pepper
(a pinch of each)
- ½ Tbs. butter for each potato (optional)
- A potato masher/fork



What to do:

1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.
2. Together with your child, wash the potatoes well.
3. Prick some holes in the potatoes with a fork, and rub them all over with a little cooking oil.
4. Place the potato directly on the oven rack (no pan needed) and bake for 45 to 60 minutes, until it's tender (e.g., use a toothpick or fork).
5. Take the potato out of the oven and set aside until it's cool.
6. Cut the potato in half.
7. Together, scoop the meat of the potato out into a bowl. Keep the skins.
8. Have your child add the milk, 2/3 of the cheese, salt and pepper to the potato meat. If you like butter, add it in now.
9. Use the masher to mash the potato mixture. Talk about how the ingredients are blending together.
10. Have your child scoop the potato mixture back into the potato skin, put it on a baking pan, and sprinkle the remaining cheese on the top of it.
11. Bake at 350 degrees for 20 minutes or when the cheese starts to melt.

Community Resources

National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders

<https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/speech-and-language#2>

Find information on young children's typical language development, an interactive language development milestone checklist and information on what to do if your child's language seems delayed.

Get Ready to Read!

<http://getreadytoread.org>

Get Ready to Read! is designed to support parents and educators in the development of early literacy skills in the years prior to kindergarten.

Talk with Your Baby

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tkeYwh6G9Ho>

One-minute video by Dr. John Medina discussing the importance of talking to baby.

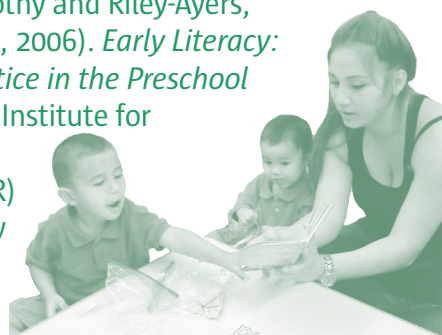
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Suggested Books

Recommended by **Hawaii State Public Library** www.librarieshawaii.org.

Infants and Toddlers

All Fall Down by Helen Oxenbury

This colorful board book depicts children in everyday events using common objects. Your child will engage in easy to imitate and name movements.

Baby Babble by Kate Merritt

Baby Babble is a vocabulary book that features baby eating and playing. It even has things inside and outside of a baby's home. These books are chew-proof, rip-proof, and drool-proof!

Preschoolers

National Geographic Little Kids First Big Book of Why by Amy Shields

This nonfiction book will encourage your child to ask questions, think big thoughts, and get answers that are accurate, engaging, and based on sound educational findings.

Ook the Book and Other Silly Rhymes by Lissa Rovetch

This rhyming book will have your child engaged in fun, tongue-twisting rhymes and colorful illustrations.



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