



# Learning to Grow

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

## Building Relationships with Effective Communication

Did you know that how you communicate with children in your care can have a strong impact on their security, learning, and relationships? In fact, every warm, responsive interaction you have helps to build pathways in the brain for language, emotional regulation, and problem-solving. When children feel heard and understood, they are more cooperative, confident, and resilient.

Whether you're a parent, caregiver, or educator, the way you speak with children shapes how they see themselves and the world. Here are some specific things you can do when talking to children:

- ♥ **Get on their level** – Kneel or sit close to your child so you are face-to-face or eye-to-eye with her, and she will see that you are genuinely interested in what she is saying or doing. This increases connection by helping the child feel seen and heard.
- ♥ **Use simple, clear language** - Young children process information in short phrases better than long explanations. This helps her understand what you want. For example, "Please tell me what you want-- you can point or use your words," or "We can run outside; we use walking feet inside." When she knows what you want, it makes it easier for her to respond.
- ♥ **Practice active listening** – Listen closely to what the speaker is saying and reflect back what you hear or see. For instance, show interest and attentiveness through nodding, focus on the child, have conversations without becoming distracted, and ask follow-up questions for more information. For example, if your child says, "I don't like it," you can ask, "Can you tell me or point to what you don't like?"



In this newsletter, we will explore strategies for effectively communicating with children across all age levels—infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

### 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,
- ♥ **Resources:** for more information, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.

# Infants

Infants begin to communicate the moment they are born. You might be familiar with some of the ways they communicate, such as crying, facial expressions, and body movements. Your infant might be telling you she feels uncomfortable, needs to burp or have her diaper changed, or she wants you to hold her and provide comfort. Learning to decipher your baby's cries is called tuning in-- listening or tuning in to what your infant is communicating. Once you understand what is being communicated, you can respond quickly and appropriately. Here are some ways to communicate and begin building a strong, loving relationship:

- ♥ **Get on their level** - When you are close to your infant, use "Parentese" by varying the pitch of your voice. - Use a high-pitched sing-song voice to exaggerate words such as "I loooooovve yooooouuuu," or "Mooooore?" Unlike "baby talk" (nonsensical sounds such as "Gaga goo-goo."), using parentese with infants stimulates brain development.
- ♥ **Use simple, clear language** - As you hold your infant close and look into her eyes, the sound



of your voice brings her comfort. Don't worry about how you sound when you sing; she will respond because you are singing to her. Your infant will try to mimic the sounds you're making when you speak or sing to her often.

- ♥ **Practice active listening** - Respond to your infant's coos and sounds as quickly as possible. You cannot spoil an infant by responding quickly to their crying. Tune in to what she is communicating and respond in a nurturing, calm way. This shows her that she matters, and when she needs something, her needs will be met by someone who is consistently there for her.

## Activity for Infants: : *Alert Attention*

What You Need:  
Nothing

What to Do:

1. When your baby is awake, tune in to her as much as possible.
2. Talk to her about the things and activities around her.
3. Smile at her often and respond to her smiles.
4. Cuddle her and gently stroke her face, arms, and legs.
5. Hold her so you are facing each other.
6. Kiss or blow three or four quick kisses on your baby's tummy. Exaggerate your movements by shaking your head as you blow on her tummy with your lips.
7. Encourage other family members to talk and play with her.
8. Respond to her cries with a gentle voice. Don't let your baby cry it out. Crying is her way of communicating. Your response lets her know she is heard and cared for.



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

# Toddlers

Toddlers communicate through a mixture of body language (pointing and nodding) and emerging words. During this age, you will start to see them transition from pointing to something -- to trying to say words, and then combining words, such as "more milk."

The following are ways to communicate effectively with your toddler:

- ♥ **Get on their level** - You can do this anywhere, including outdoors. Crouch down on her level in the grass to look at what has caught her attention. Comment on what she is seeing and saying. For example, "Yes, you see so many legs on the green caterpillar." This helps your toddler feel that her interests are important and that she is important to you.
- ♥ **Use simple, clear language** - Toddlers are easily distracted and can get overwhelmed by lots of words. Instead of saying "It's clean-up time" and assuming that your toddler knows what you want them to do (even if you do it multiple times a day), use specific language and limit the instructions to only 1-2 steps at a time. For example, "Please pick up the blocks and put them in the box."
- ♥ **Practice active listening** - Give your toddler time to find the words for their ideas. Pause for 10 seconds after asking a question and wait to hear what your toddler says rather than saying the words for them. You can also encourage your toddler to use words by repeating back what you think your child wants or needs. For example, if she says "Apple," you can say, "Are you still hungry? Do you want more apple?"



## Activity for Toddlers: Flashlight Search

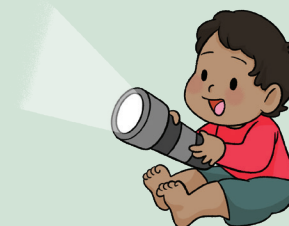
What You Need:

A flashlight

What to Do:

1. Sit or stand close to your child and shine a flashlight on different parts of the room, such as the wall, the door, or the floor, and name them. For example, "There is the wall." "There is the door."
2. Give clear instructions as you ask your toddler to shine the flashlight on specific objects and tell you what she finds.
3. Give her simple directions. For example, "Shine the light on the ceiling. Now shine the light on the window." Pause for 10 seconds to give her time to process what you have asked her to do.
4. Praise her when she finds the right object, for example, "Yes, you shone the flashlight on the window!" "Great work finding the window."

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





# Preschoolers

By now, you should understand what your preschooler is saying most of the time. She may be speaking in full sentences, asking questions to get information, and expressing herself with confidence. This is a time when conversations begin to take on new meaning. Conversations are usually longer, with 3 or 4 back-and-forth interactions, which she may initiate and participate in.

The following are ways you can communicate effectively with your preschooler:

- ♥ **Get on their level** - Be in close proximity to your child. Secure your preschooler's attention by being close to her and speaking her name before you engage in conversation. When adults raise their voice from across the room, the child has to shift her attention from what she is doing to engage with the adult.
- ♥ **Use simple, clear language** - Avoid posing statements as a question. For example, "Could you please put your toys away?" This question allows her to say "No" or ignore the question.



Instead, say something like this, "Please put your toys away." This gives her a clear understanding of what you want her to do.

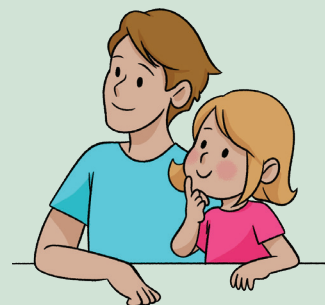
- ♥ **Practice active listening** - Make time and space to really listen to your preschooler. Show interest in the things that she is interested in. Ask open-ended questions, which are questions that you don't know the answer to. For example, when she is coloring, instead of asking "What color is that?" you can ask "What are you creating?" This shows her that you are interested in what she is doing rather than if she knows the right answer.

## Activity for Preschoolers: I Spy

What You Need:  
Nothing

What to Do:

1. Choose one player to be the "Spy" who selects a visible object without revealing it. Make sure everyone can see the object.
2. The Spy gives a clear, specific clue by saying, for example, "I spy with my little eye, something that is red (color/shape/texture or size of the object)."
3. The other player or players take turns asking questions about the object, such as, "Is it in the car with us?" "Is it my red wallet?"
4. The player who correctly guesses the object will be the next spy.



*This is a great game to play while having to wait in the car. It shows your preschooler that you enjoy playing and being close to her, and are curious about how she sees the world around her.*

*(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

- ♥ Learn through her senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching
- ♥ Develop eye-hand coordination

### Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Feel important and good about herself
- ♥ Develop her unique identity

### Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Increase her observation, listening, and understanding skills and her attention span
- ♥ Connect words and sounds she hears with what she experiences

### Cognitive Development

- ♥ Develop her thinking and problem-solving skills
- ♥ Recognize math concepts (sequencing, patterning)



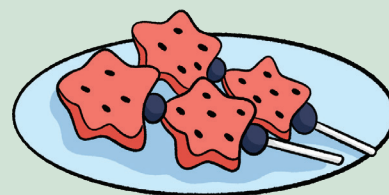
## Kids in the Kitchen

Cooking teaches valuable lessons such as math (quantities, measurement), science (how matter changes), fine motor (stirring, pouring), and literacy (print awareness). As you make this recipe with your child, talk about kitchen safety. Show her how to handle items safely and allow her to do as much as she is capable of. Praise her efforts, and ask questions throughout the process to encourage her thinking skills. Most of all, have fun!

### Summer Fruit Kabobs

Ingredients:

- 2 watermelons
- 1 (10.5-ounce) package fresh blueberries
- Bamboo skewers
- Star cookie cutter



Directions:

1. Sit close with your child as you slice watermelon into thick slices, and tell her what you are doing and why. Explain how she can cut out stars using a cookie cutter. Answer any questions she might have.
2. Together with keiki, skewer about 15 blueberries on a bamboo skewer and 1 watermelon star on top. Repeat with the remaining ingredients. Engage in conversation as you are working together. You can ask, "Do you like making fruit kabobs?" Then pause and listen to her response.

Kids love fruit skewers for the 4th of July, and they are always a major hit – older keiki can help with assembly. Tip: Don't cut the watermelon too thinly, otherwise the stars will break when you are trying to skewer them.



## Resources

### **Strategies for Promoting Nurturing, Responsive Relationships with Infants**

<https://challengingbehavior.org/docs/Strategies-promoting-relationships-infants.pdf>

This flyer from challengingbehaviors.org highlights 6 age groups between birth and 36 months. Each age group will provide additional strategies for promoting nurturing, responsive relationships with your infant and toddler.

### **Languagizing with Kathy Hirsh-Pasek**

<https://sesameworkshop.org/resources/languagizing-with-kathy-hirsh-pasek/#>

This Sesame Street website, offers a webinar and additional information to highlight the importance of encouraging caregivers to promote healthy



language development through conversations, and by creating interactive, language-rich environments.

## Suggested Books

Discover these books and more at the **Hawai'i State Public Library** [www.librarieshawaii.org](http://www.librarieshawaii.org).

### **Infants and Toddlers**

#### ***Baby! Talk!* by Penny Gentieu**

Infants will enjoy looking at the pictures of other babies in this book. Each page introduces a baby doing things that babies do, such as finding their feet, playing patty-cake, eating, hugging, and more.

#### ***Can You Say Please? (Rookie Toddler)* by Children's Press**

This book introduces manners to children, such as sharing and how important it is to say please and thank you.

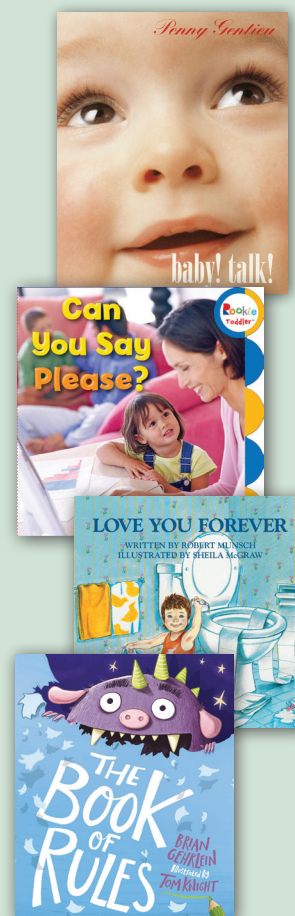
### **Preschoolers**

#### ***Love You Forever* by Robert Munsch**

"I'll love you forever, I'll like you for always, as long as I'm living, my baby, you'll be." This story of the love a mama has for her child touches both children and adults alike. The ending has a twist most don't see coming.

#### ***The Book of Rules* by Brian Gehrlein**

This book clearly presents a series of rules that the children must follow to avoid being eaten by Dennis the monster. Some of these rules include sitting on the floor, making a fish face, and preparing to listen mindfully.



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