

Tips for Toddler Communication

Talk to your child all day long. Narrate what you are doing: talk about what you see when you are driving, name foods you are buying at the grocery store, describe how you are making dinner. It doesn't matter what you are saying, as long as you are talking to them.

Listen to your toddler, as they will often give you hints of what really excites them. Things that are exciting can be great opportunities to practice talking because they are highly motivating. "Look! A car!"

Don't anticipate their needs. Once your child initiates interaction for *any* reason, even if you know what they want, pause and **wait for at least 5 seconds**. Don't prompt, but rather look expectantly, raise your eyebrows, hands in the air, etc. as if you are asking "what?" If your child doesn't respond, provide an appropriate model based on their level of ability (a gesture or signed word, verbal word, etc.) and wait for them to repeat it back. If still no response, model it again and wait. If they are unable to say what you modeled for them, allow an easier/less mature method of communication, as long as they are communicating. (Eg. If you are working on verbal words, but they can't seem to produce the word you are modeling, allow them to use a gesture or signed word instead.)

Narrate your child's play, and elaborate on any words they say. For example, he says, "bang," you say, "Yes, I see you are banging," or "Bang the hammer," or "You are hitting the nail."

Read as much as possible. While reading, don't feel obligated to read the text exactly. Substitute shorter words where it makes sense, and feel free to make up words when there isn't any text at all.

Setting up your child for spontaneous communication:

- Make desired items in view, but out of reach.
- Give small portions (of *everything*) so they have to request for more.
- Play with toys that your child needs help to use, and therefore will need to ask for it!
- "Forget" an essential item needed for play.
- Offer choices so they can verbalize preferences.
- Make mistakes on purpose so they can help correct you.

Helpful hints for repeating:

- Keep it simple! Try words that are short, single-syllable words like: book, cup, ball, cow, go, up.
- Try words with single sounds in the beginning like "cup" rather than two sounds like "glass." If they really want to try a harder word with two sounds, feel free to drop one, even though it may sound silly at first. Example: "bue" for blue for "geen" for green.
- Try more familiar words like "cat" as opposed to cheetah or "bike" rather than motorcycle.
- If a word seems too complex (for repeating or understanding), make up a shorter one that will be the best fit at the time, even if it's not exactly what you hope to say.

- Let your child know the word you want them to say, and model it slowly to them. For example, “Sarah, can you say ‘mmmmmmooooorrrre?’” and wait for a response.
- Draw attention to your mouth by pointing to it or holding a preferred object near it while asking them to repeat the word you are modeling.

Also, in American English there are approximately 25 consonant sounds (or “letters”), and some are easier to say than others. There is a natural sequence that most children develop these sounds, starting at birth through about six years of age. It makes sense then, as a general rule of thumb, to ask your child to imitate the earlier developing sounds first as they will be most likely to have greater success. Don’t be afraid to try anything, this is just a general rule.

Earlier sounds: /m, p, b, g, k, n, w, h/

Middle sounds: /s, z, t, d, f, l, y/

Later sounds: /r, sh, ch, v, zh, th, j/