

A PEATC

Do You Know....



Factsheet for Virginia's Parents Supporting Language Development for Young Children

The Role of Parents in Language Development

Parents are with their children more than anyone and play a key role in their child's language development. Studies have found that children's language development **by the age of two** is one of the strongest indicators of later language development. In addition to supports that can be provided by day care and early learning programs, parents can support early language development from birth onward.

Types of Language

Expressive Language refers to the words that your baby or child uses to communicate, i.e., talking, gestures, signing, etc.

Receptive Language refers to the words and concepts that children understand. Usually receptive language develops more quickly. Your baby can understand what you and others are saying before he is able to use words independently.

If you believe that your child is language delayed, do not hesitate to have her evaluated by a speech language pathologist or, by an audiologist, if you suspect a hearing impairment. **You can also ask for an evaluation through Virginia's Early Intervention Program** (See *Early Intervention* Fact Sheet). While children develop at their own pace, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) has charts to help families learn when **most** children will reach each milestone. Visit ASHA's [How Does Your Child Hear and Talk?](#) for more information.

What Should I do with my Baby to Encourage Language?

- **Talk, laugh, sing, read, and play** with your baby.
- Use **signs and gestures** as you speak.
- Be sure to **look at your baby** when you talk to her.
- **Take turns.** Let your baby respond with cooing, a gesture, or a smile
- If your baby is looking or pointing at something, **tell her what it is** and talk about it.
- **Copy the sounds** your baby makes as well as having "real" conversations.
- **Speak naturally** and try not to use "baby talk" too often.

Resources on Early Language Development for Infants and Young Children

[Centre for Community Child Health](#)

[Zero to Three: Supporting Language
and Literacy Skills](#)

[How Parents and Families Support
Oral Language and Vocabulary](#)

Contact Us:

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Factsheet for Virginia's Parents

What Should I do with my Preschooler to Encourage Language?

- **Build on your toddler's interests.** If he is excited about the kitty, talk about the kitty, what color he is, what he likes to eat, how to pet him, etc.
- **Use new words** often and read books that repeat words. **Children love repetition.** Read books he likes and let him turn the pages and help you read.
- **Name pictures and ask questions** when you read with your preschooler.
- **Don't correct his pronunciation**, but, go ahead and **repeat the right pronunciation** in a sentence, e.g., she says "dada go work". You can say, "you're right, daddy is going to work." She'll catch on!
- If he can't be understood by others, **help "translate"** so that he feels successful in using language and is willing to keep trying.
- **Tell stories and let your child tell you stories.** You can tell stories about pictures you see, characters on TV, stories, make up fairytales, etc.
- When you are out in the world, **read road signs and label things** you see, e.g., "look at the fireman in the red firetruck." Ask her what she sees.

What Happens if My Child Gets Bored?

Toddlers have short attention spans. **It is perfectly normal** if your child only wants to read a few pages of a book, gets up and down or wants to change activities a lot. **Follow your child's lead and have fun.**

What if I Don't Speak English?

If **English is not your family's primary language**, it may be beneficial to enroll your child in a day care or preschool setting where she will have English language models. At the same time, you can teach your child your native language. **There are many benefits to being bilingual** (speaking two languages). What is important is that **your child be able to express his needs** so that he feels safe, secure, and heard. Developing partnerships with early learning providers will be important to helping your child succeed when English is his second language.

Tips from the National Association for Education of Young Children

- When I point to something, tell me what it is.
- Use a gesture along with the word you say, so that I can say it too.
- Talk to me about what you are doing and what will happen next.
- Take turns chatting back and forth with me. Ask questions that don't have a right or wrong answer.
- Model bigger and better sentences. I say, "two cat." You say, "there are two cats in the house."
- Sing and rhyme with me.
- Take me to the library.
- Make books about me.
- Show me the words on things.
- Be playful while I learn.
- Give me time to learn and explore. I'll learn letters and colors in my own time.

PEATC's mission focuses on building positive futures for Virginia's children by working collaboratively with families, schools and communities to improve opportunities for excellence in education and success in school and community life.

For more information about us, please contact:

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