



Having Meaningful Conversations with Your Infant or Toddler

Did you know your child is ready to have a conversation with you even before he can talk? And the way you respond really matters! Even if your child is not talking yet, he is eager to communicate by making babbling sounds, smiling, kicking, pointing, or using first words. By responding in a loving voice and using lots of interesting words, you encourage these first attempts to communicate and build your child's language as you go. Paying attention, making eye contact, holding your baby's hand, and taking every opportunity to talk with your child, even if he's not yet talking back, are all ways you help your child develop a healthy brain, important language skills, and positive relationships with others.

Make every minute you have with your child count! Be responsive to your little one throughout the day: when you change a diaper, feed or give your child a bath, get ready for bed, or play together!

Here are some ways that you can build your child's communication skills, healthy brain development, and a trusting relationship.

What You Do	Why It's Important
Make face-to-face contact	Your baby loves to look at your face more than anything in the world.
Use a sing-song, high-pitched voice and stretch out words as you talk	Young children pay closer attention to the words you say because they prefer to hear you talk this way. Be sure you're still using correct words, not baby talk.
Gently touch your child's hand, arm, or leg when talking with her	Pairing your touch with talk helps your baby learn the words you are saying.
Use facial expressions to communicate your feelings	Your child will learn the meaning of words that describe emotions and use these words to express her emotions.
Communicate with your child in a loving and nurturing voice	Hearing a positive tone of voice makes your child feel safe and less stressed. This has a long-lasting, positive effect on the brain, and influences early learning and the ability to form positive relationships with others.
Talk about what your child is doing or appears to be interested in. "I see you are kicking your feet. You must be excited!" "You see the clouds in the sky. They are way up high!"	Your child will learn more words when you talk about her interests.
Be a sportscaster! Narrate what you are doing as you engage in play or care for your child. "I am tying your shoe so it will stay on your foot."	Your child will learn words that describe objects, actions, and events.



What You Do	Why It's Important
Use interesting words and complete sentences.	Long before children can talk they are learning words and sentences they will use when they begin to talk.
<p>Acknowledge your child's cry as an attempt to express discomfort, hunger, or need for comfort from an adult.</p> <p>"I hear you crying, do you need my attention?"</p>	When you respond to your child's crying as her attempt to communicate to let you know she needs something, she is learning that she can depend on and trust the adults in her life to take care of her.
When your child tries to communicate respond by using words, facial expressions, touch, or gestures. Your child may communicate by cooing, babbling, using facial expressions, making gestures, or saying words.	Your response makes your child want to communicate with you again. This back and forth process builds healthy brains and teaches young children the give and take of adult conversations. This is called a serve and return interaction.
Engage your child in playful interactions like Peek-a-Boo.	Loving and playful interactions build close relationships between you and your child and also help develop your child's brain.
Use gestures to communicate the meaning of words (for example, point to objects as you say words or act out the meaning of words)	Pointing to objects or acting out the meaning of words helps children learn the meaning of words you say. Using gestures helps to build your child's vocabulary, which is critical and necessary for later learning in school.
Talk with your child in your home language	All children are able to learn more than one language from birth. This does not confuse or delay your child in any way. Speaking more than one language has many benefits for children and keeps them connected to their families and culture.

