



All children are born with the ability to communicate.

Helping children learn how to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas is important for brain development. These skills are also very important for helping children when they get to school. Children with disabilities may demonstrate alternative ways of meeting the goals of language development. These may include gestures, symbols, pictures, signs or other ways of communicating. When a language other than English is spoken in the home, it is important for children to develop language skills in their home language.

In this domain your child will develop skills in these specific areas:

Receptive Language: Young children will listen to, understand and respond to language.

Expressive language: Young children grow in their abilities to use language to express thoughts and needs.

Pragmatics: Young children understand, follow, and use appropriate social rules including using facial expressions and hand gestures. Children also learn how to have a one-on-one conversation.

Language Development of Dual Language Learners: Young children in homes where English is not the primary language, learn to listen to, understand, and use language. This usually happens first in their home language. When they have the opportunity to hear and speak English, young children learn to express thoughts and ideas in English.

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

BOOKS

BABIES & TODDLERS

Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes by Annie Kubler*

Big Red Barn by Margaret Wise Brown

Mother Goose by Sylvia Long

I Read Signs by Tana Hoban

From Head to Toe by Eric Carle*

PRESCHOOLERS

Listen to the Rain by Bill Martin

One Duck Stuck by Phyllis Root

Is Your Mama a Llama by Deborah Guarino*

Shout! Shout It Out! by Denise Fleming

Pepi Sings a New Song by Laura Ljungkvist

The Runaway Bunny by Margaret Wise Brown*

Press Here by Herve Tullet

Own Moon by Jane Yolen

* Available in Spanish

All books available through the Rhode Island Library system

Following Directions

Young children grow in their abilities to listen to, understand, and use language to express thoughts and needs.

ACTIVITIES

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Additional Domains:



TIPS

- As children learn language, at first they will understand more words than they are able to say.
- When talking to your child, make eye contact and give your full attention whenever possible.
- Games are a fun way to practice following directions. There are many childhood games based on listening to words and following directions. Make practicing following directions fun by playing these games:
 - Simon Says
 - Hokey Pokey
 - Red Light, Green Light
 - Mother May I?
 - Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes
 - Duck, Duck, Goose



BABIES

Babies can understand more words than they can say. When you read with your baby, point to the picture as you say the word to draw attention to it. Point to familiar people in a photograph and name them. Give your child practice following simple one-step directions, like “Come here” or “Give me the ball.”



TODDLERS

Toddlers grow every day in their ability to understand what others say. When you read with your toddler, ask your child to point to different characters, objects, or animals in the book. Name familiar people in a photograph and ask your child to point to them. Without pointing or signaling, give your toddler more challenging directions to follow. For example, while getting dressed, ask your child to “Please lift your arms.” When your toddler can follow one-step directions, try asking for two things. Ex. “Find your shoes and bring them to me.”



PRESCHOOLERS

Preschoolers develop the skill to understand a conversation and respond to questions. Preschoolers understand longer and more complex sentences. When you are reading a story together, ask your preschooler to retell a favorite part or describe what happened to a specific character. Give your child multi-step directions to follow. For example, “Wash your hands, get your plate and come to the table.”

REFLECTIONS

- Your child may have a favorite rhyme, song, or book that is requested over and over. Why do you think this is your child’s favorite? How does your child respond to it?

Words, Words and More Words

Young children learn to express thoughts through sounds and words.

ACTIVITIES

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Additional Domains:



BABIES

Babies try to make new sounds at an early age. Babbling, begins with one letter sound, like buh buh buh. Then they try new sounds like bahbah or mahmahmah. Eventually, they learn that certain sounds mean something, like Mama and Dada. Your baby will try to tell you a whole thought with one word. Show your baby that you understand. For example, when your baby says “ball”, you can say, “Yes! I see you have the ball.”



TODDLERS

Toddlers begin to put words together and use their hands to help show what they mean. Your toddler may point to the door and say “Go out.”

You can expand your toddler’s vocabulary by adding describing words to what they say. If your toddler says “My ball,” you can say “Your red ball” or “Your round ball.” This encourages your child to add more words when speaking.



PRESCHOOLERS

Preschoolers speak in more complex sentences and use more words. Their speech is clear enough that unfamiliar people understand what is being said.

Preschoolers ask lots of “who”, “what”, “why” and “where” questions as they try to understand the world. Encourage your preschooler by responding to the questions as best you can. Or ask them, “I don’t know. Why do you think that happened?”

TIPS

- Young children learn language by hearing language spoken by others. Children not only hear the sounds and words that are spoken, but observe how the sound is created.
- Notice how your baby watches your lips when you speak. Very young children may try to touch your mouth or tongue while you speak. This is one way young children learn about how to speak.
- Young children may use their hands instead of words to communicate. As their vocabulary develops, it is important to encourage children to use words.
- If you are worried about your child’s ability to make sounds, say words, or communicate with you, share that information with your child’s doctor. The doctor will let you know if your child’s language development is where it should be.

REFLECTIONS

- During the early years, your child’s language will grow more quickly than any other time in life. What new sounds and words does your child know? Use the back of this card to document the sounds and words your child uses (for example, “baba” for bottle or “puckie” for pancake). You’ll want to remember first words, even those that were invented by your child!

Tell Me a Story

Children develop the skill to use words and language in social situations.

ACTIVITIES

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Additional Domains:



TIPS

- Children learn the rules of conversation in different settings by watching and talking with the adults around them. You can support your child's understanding by providing different opportunities to talk together and by helping your child take turns in conversations.
- Simple board games can help children practice the social skills they need. Talking about the game as you play encourages this. For example, "Whose turn is it?" "Can I have the dice?"

REFLECTIONS

- What went well today? What did you like most about your day (with grandma, at preschool etc.) Ask your preschooler to tell you about the day. Ask questions to help your child think about what happened first, second, and last. Talk about things your child enjoys, like what kind of snack was served, how it tasted, activities of the day and the trip home. Write the story of the day on the back of this card.

BABIES



Babies learn to speak by hearing lots of language. They use body language like kicking their legs, waving their arms and smiling as a way to show they are interested in what you are saying. Tell your baby a simple story, like what happened during your visit to the doctor. First, lay or sit your baby in front of you. Get your baby's attention by making eye contact. Watch how your baby responds to your voice with facial expressions, sounds, and movements. Respond by copying the facial expressions and sounds.

TODDLERS



Toddlers enjoy playing with and talking to adults and other children. This is how they learn to participate in simple turn-taking during one-on-one conversations. Talk with your child as you go through your day, during breakfast, while walking or driving to school, and before bed. Ask questions and encourage your child to go back and forth in the conversation with you. Say something silly to see how your child responds.

PRESCHOOLERS



Preschoolers learn how to use words in a conversation and how people relate to each other when they are speaking together. This includes things like: making eye contact, taking turns talking, using facial expressions, and using inside versus outside voices. To give your child practice in taking turns, play simple back and forth games—throwing a ball, putting a puzzle together, or playing cards games like Go Fish. While you play, take turns talking with your child, asking questions and giving answers.