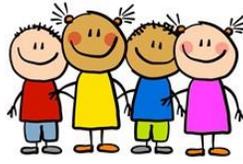


# What needs to happen before my child will talk?



The following skills are important building blocks for language. Remember that children need to be able to understand their environment before they can talk about it. Also keep in mind that every child is different, meaning that some children may need to focus more, or less, on specific skills than peers of the same age.

- **Eye Contact/Joint Attention** Your child needs to be able to initiate and maintain eye contact with others. This is essential in being able to give and receive a communication message. If we are making eye contact with others, we will try to communicate with them or listen/look for their message. **Joint/Shared Referencing** is also important. In this skill, the child will look at an object, look to the parent, and then look back at the object as if to say, “Do you see what I’m seeing?”
- **Attention** Your child needs to be able to attend to a task, item, or person for a sufficient amount of time. If a child’s attention is fleeting in nature, he/she will not stay long enough with a task to learn about it, thus will not have words to describe or request it.
- **Sounds** Your child needs to be able to babble and produce early developing sounds (i.e. h,w,p,b,m,n,d,t) in repeating consonant-vowel patterns (e.g. “ma-ma-ma” or “ba-ba-ba”). Encourage vocal play by imitating the sounds and words your child produces in a fun way, sometimes turning sounds into words that might be relevant to the play context (e.g. if your child says “ba-ba-ba” while banging a block, you might say “ba-ba-boom!” also while banging a block). Also model sound effects such as animal sounds and car sounds.
- **Facial Expressions & Gestures** Nonverbal language is an important part of a child’s communication. Adult responses to a child’s use of facial expressions and gestures will help the child learn that communication is valued and will help motivate him/her to continue to attempt to communicate.
- **Imitation** Before a child begins saying words, he/she needs to be imitating them from others. Imitation skills usually happen in a progression: gross motor (actions) are first, followed by sounds, then oral-motor actions, then words. Avoid asking your child to “say” a word. Instead, imitate your child’s actions, sounds and words, and playfully encourage him/her to imitate you.
- **Turn-taking** Once a child understands imitation, turn-taking will usually closely follow. Turn-taking is very important as it is what communication is all about: I say something, then you say something, then I say something, etc. This skill can follow the same progression as imitation.
- **Cause & Effect** Your child needs to know that he/she can use an object to create a sound or action (e.g. squeeze the stuffed animal and it will make noise, push the button on the toy and an object will pop up, etc.). Once cause & effect is established in play, it then needs to be present in communication (e.g. pushing away a toothbrush to avoid brushing teeth, etc.).
- **Pretend Play/Symbolic Reasoning** Play is the way that children learn about language and the world. Keep interactions with children playful and avoid asking too many questions. Model early pretend play such as feeding a baby, using a block as a pretend phone, and using a blanket to make a tent. Also encourage symbolic reasoning by talking about pictures in books and associating them with real things (e.g. point to a picture of a dog and say “dog... woof!” or pretend to eat a picture of cookies, saying “yummy cookies!”) to help your child begin to understand the relationship between symbols and real things.
- **Response to Words/Directions** Children need to understand words before they begin using them. Remember to speak to your child on the level that they themselves would speak—use only 1-3 words when giving them directions, and whenever possible add a gesture (e.g. rather than saying “Go get your shoes so we can go”, instead try “get shoes” while pointing in the direction of the shoes or tapping the shoes).