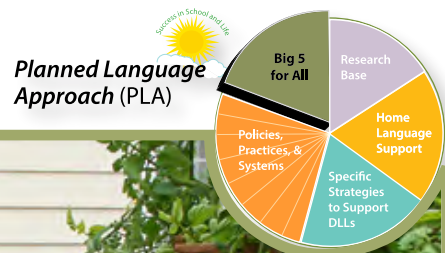


How Parents and Families Support Oral Language and Vocabulary

STRATEGIES



Introduction

Oral language refers to all aspects of spoken language, including children’s growing vocabularies of new and varied words. When children have strong language models, they develop strong language skills. Dual language learners develop early language and vocabulary skills in two (or more) languages.

Children show that they are developing oral language when they:

- ▶ Communicate their needs through crying or smiling
- ▶ Babble and coo
- ▶ Say their first words
- ▶ Learn and use new vocabulary
- ▶ Use phrases, sentences, and stories that become more complex over time

Talking to children supports both receptive (hearing and understanding languages) and expressive (making and using their language knowledge) language skills. It is well documented that when parents and family members provide young children with rich language experiences in any language, children are more likely to learn to read and comprehend grade-level texts in the early and later grades (Lonigan, Schatschneider, & Westberg, 2008; NICHD-ECCRN, 2005).

Contents . . .

for **Babies**
page 2–3

for **Toddlers**
page 4–5

for **Preschoolers**
page 6–7

Supporting babies to Develop Oral Language and Vocabulary

STRATEGIES

Parents and family members support babies' oral language development by talking to them—even when they are still in the womb! When adults give even the youngest babies opportunities to participate in “conversations,” they are helping children become eager and able talkers—first as they babble and coo and later as they speak their first words, phrases, and sentences.



Babies begin to develop Oral Language and Vocabulary when parents and family members:

- ▶ Are responsive to babies' needs for feeding, changing, comforting, and cuddling (Silven, Niemi, & Voeten, 2002)
- ▶ Use child-directed speech or “parentese,” which means speaking in a higher pitch, at a slower rate, with clearer enunciation, and in simpler and shorter phrases, combined with gestures and facial expressions (Snow, 1991)
- ▶ Talk, read, and sing to babies in one or more languages (Hoff et al., 2012)
- ▶ Engage babies in “conversations” by responding with different facial expressions, gestures, and/or words each time a baby babbles and coos (Fernald & Weisleder, 2011)
- ▶ Talk to babies about what they see, hear, and smell wherever they go (Murray & Yingling, 2000)
- ▶ Explain routines, such as getting dressed, meal time, bathing, or swaddling (Strickland & Riley-Ayers, 2006; Silven, Niemi, & Voeten, 2002; Weizman & Snow, 2001)
- ▶ Use gestures, such as pointing, to direct children's attention to objects or people of interest (e.g., “Look! See the squirrel!”) (Harris, Golinkoff, & Hirsh-Pasek, 2011)
- ▶ Teach them simple signs or gestures to help them communicate such basic messages as “eat,” “drink,” “up,” and “all done” (Thompson, Cotnoir-Bichelman, Mc Kerchar, Tate, & Dancho, 2007)
- ▶ Share books with brightly colored illustrations or photos and label and describe the pictures (Hoffman & Cassano, 2013)



Some ways parents and family members support babies' Oral Language and Vocabulary

At Home



Lucinda is changing her baby's diaper when she asks, "Should we throw away this dirty diaper?" At the sound of Lucinda's voice, the baby responds, "Ba-ba-ba-ba." "Ba-ba-ba," Lucinda echoes and then says, "I agree! We should get rid of this icky, stinky diaper!" Lucinda drops the diaper into a nearby trash can. "All gone! Now here is a clean, new diaper just for you." As the baby continues to babble and coo, Lucinda responds, "You are welcome!"

On a Home Visit



Anna, a home visitor, talks with Melanie, the mother of 4-year-old Soledad and 6-month-old José, about why it is so important for parents to talk to their children. "The more you talk to them, the more words they will learn!" Although Melanie now understands how important it is to talk to her children in Spanish at home, she is not sure what to talk about—especially with José. "Talk about what you are doing," Anna explains, "getting dressed, having a bath, making dinner. When he babbles, respond like he said something interesting—nod, smile, and talk to him. You can also talk about the things you see." Anna continues and says, "Point to something and say, 'Look! There goes the mail truck. It is delivering letters and packages.' This will help José *and* Soledad learn new words." Anna also shares how important it is for Soledad and José's father to also talk to José so that he learns from all family members.



Supporting toddlers to develop Oral Language and Vocabulary

STRATEGIES

The number of words children know and understand expands rapidly from 18 months to 3 years. Toddlers are also developing oral language when they begin to speak in simple sentences and say such things as “go bye-bye,” “all done,” and “mommy home.”

Not all toddlers develop oral language in the same way. Some show slow, steady growth, while others progress in spurts (sudden increases) in the number of words they know. Toddlers *learn the words in the languages that they hear*. So it is important that they hear lots of language(s) during this exciting period of development.



Toddlers develop Oral Language and Vocabulary when parents and family members:

- ▶ Talk to toddlers frequently using different and interesting words (Huttenlocher, Waterfall, Vasilyeva, Vevea, & Hedges, 2010; Hoff & Naigles, 2002; Collins, 2012; Pan, Rowe, Singer, & Snow, 2005)
- ▶ Have one-on-one conversations every day (Wells, 1985) and aim for five conversational turns for each speaker (Dickinson, 2011)
- ▶ Intentionally teach words and word meanings (e.g., “The sign says ‘Caution.’ So we need to be careful.”) (Collins, 2010; Elley, 1989) and repeat these new words over time to increase toddlers’ understanding of them (e.g., “That yellow light means caution—just like the sign we saw. Cars need to be careful!”) (Carey, 1978)
- ▶ Answer children’s questions, particularly those about why and how the world works (e.g., “The sun is setting—going down. That’s why it is getting dark outside.”) (Beals, 1997; Tabors, Beals, & Weizman, 2001)
- ▶ Build on what children say (e.g., “Yes. That is an airplane. The airplane is flying across the sky.”) (Barnes, Gutfreund, Satterly, & Wells, 1983)
- ▶ Model how to use language correctly; for example, if the child says, “Bear goed to sleep,” respond with, “Oh, your bear went to sleep? Good night bear!”
Note: do not ask children to repeat the phrase correctly (Stechuk & Burns, 2005).
- ▶ Ask questions that help toddlers provide explanations (e.g., “How did you get those blocks to stand up?”), descriptions (e.g., “What does it look like?”), or observations (e.g., “What is your sissy doing?”) (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001)
- ▶ Read (and re-read) books written just for them, including books that encourage singing or clapping (also called “participation books”), books that teach new ideas (called “concept books”), and books that tell a good story (especially picture storybooks) (Hoffman & Cassano, 2013)
- ▶ Encourage imaginary play and introduce words not used in everyday experiences (e.g., “Let’s blast off to the moon? Get ready for the countdown . . . 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 . . . Blast off!”)



In the Community

Fourteen-month-old Teddy and his father are waiting to see the doctor. "Nose owie," Teddy says, sniffing and touching his nose. "Your nose hurts, huh, buddy?" Dad says. "You aren't feeling well, are you. I wonder what else hurts," Dad says as he gives Teddy's ear a gentle wiggle. "Does this hurt?" Teddy smiles and shakes his head. "How about your knuckles?" Dad bends Teddy's fingers at the knuckles. "Or your wrist? Does your wrist hurt?" he asks as he moves Teddy's wrist from side to side. Teddy laughs.

At Home

Two-year-old Sam is looking at a board book with six-year-old brother Max. "This book is about different sports. I like sports!" Max says. "Ball," Sam echoes. "Yep. That's a baseball!" Max continues. "See! It's white with stitching." "Ball!" Sam says and points to a different page. "Yep. That's a ball, too. That one is a basketball. Remember when we saw the people playing basketball in the park?" "Park!" Sam shouts! "Park park!" Max laughs. "You want to go to the park? Me too! Let's go ask Grandma to take us."



At Home

Two-year-old Julia is playing with pots and pans on the kitchen floor. "Eat you dinner," she tells her stuffed puppy, putting the pot in front of it. "Yum, yum," says her 13-year-old sister Rachel as she puts the puppy's face into the pot. Rachel then says, "Puppy says that spaghetti was delicious!" "Not -s'getti. E-zza!" Julia shouts. "Okay, okay," Rachel laughs. "That pizza was delicious! Do you have more? Puppy wants some with bones on it!" "Bones! E-zza!" Julia laughs as she stirs the pot, places it back in front of the puppy, and says, "Here-you-go, puppy!" "Puppy says 'thank you very much,'" Rachel responds. "Now, can you make me some delicious pizza with pepperoni?"

Supporting preschoolers to develop Oral Language and Vocabulary

STRATEGIES

Preschoolers are great (and sometimes tireless) conversationalists! By the age of 3, children have developed relationships, interests, and knowledge about the world that they can share with others, and they have learned to talk about these and many other aspects of their lives! Some preschoolers are “big talkers”—eager to share everything they know, while others talk less as they observe the world more quietly. In each case, children will only learn the words and languages they hear—so it’s important to support their growing vocabularies in their home language(s).



Preschoolers develop Oral Language and Vocabulary when parents and family members:

- ▶ Use lots of different and interesting words to help preschoolers build their vocabularies (Hoff & Naigles, 2002; Huttenlocher, Waterfall, Vasilyeva, Vevea, & Hedges, 2010)
- ▶ Intentionally teach what new words mean—especially when the child asks (e.g., “I was concerned. That means I was worried about you when you fell down today.”) (Wasik & Bond, 2001)
- ▶ “Tuck in” definitions of new words (e.g., “That joke was hilarious. It was really, really funny!”) (Collins, 2012; Elley, 1989)
- ▶ Read books to help children learn about their cultures and traditions as well as the natural world (Schickedanz & Collins, 2013)
- ▶ Have one-on-one conversations every day, keeping the conversation going by asking and answering questions (Crain-Thorenson & Dale, 1992), and aim for five conversational turns for each speaker (Dickinson, 2011)
- ▶ Help preschoolers describe past events or tell stories (e.g., “So you hit a piñata with a bat, and then what happened?”) (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001)
- ▶ Explain unfamiliar words when reading (e.g., “The pirate was ‘massive.’ That means he was huge! Look how massive he is!”) (Elley, 1989; Sénéchal, Thomas, & Monker, 1995)
- ▶ Take outings frequently and talk to children about what they see, hear, and smell (e.g., “Look, at that snowplow clearing the snow!”) (Baker, Sonnenschein, Serpell, Fernandez-Fein, & Scher, 1994)
- ▶ Model appropriate language without correcting children (e.g., When a child asks for an adult to remove the “banana skin,” the adult might respond with, “Sure! I can take off the banana peel for you.”)
- ▶ Support pretend play by providing objects, such as boxes of different sizes, blocks, dress-up clothes, and by playing along (e.g., “Oh yes! I’d love to eat at your restaurant. Do you have a menu so I can see what I want to eat?”)



Some ways parents and family members support preschoolers' Oral Language and Vocabulary

STRATEGIES

At Home



Carla is teaching her mom and younger sister “I’m a Little Teapot,” which she learned at Head Start. They sing it together and act it out. Her mom gets her teapot from the kitchen and talks about a couple of new words in the song. Pointing to the spout she says, “The spout is the long skinny part that the tea pours out of. And see the shape of the teapot? It’s round and chubby—stout.” Carla giggles and repeats “The spout pours out! And the pot is stout!”

At Home



Tia and her younger brother, Tomás, are sitting in a chair as their father reads to them. “Who’s that trip-trapping over my bridge, the troll bellows,” their mother reads. “What’s ‘trip-trapping’?” Tia asks? “‘Trip-trapping’ is the sound the little goat’s feet make when he walks on the wooden bridge. Like this,” Dad says as she stretches his legs and taps her feet on the floor. “Here. You try.” Tia and Tomás stretch their legs onto the floor and tap their feet. “Trip-trap, trip-trap,” they chant. As they return to their reading, Dad thinks that they might not know what “bellows” means. So she tells them that “bellows” means “yells” and then continues reading the story.



Resources for Oral Language and Vocabulary

STRATEGIES

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Resources for Oral Language and Vocabulary

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