

from
babbles
to **books**

SUPPORTING LANGUAGE &
LITERACY DEVELOPMENT
IN EARLY CHILDHOOD



contents

introduction

BABY BABBLES

learn how to:

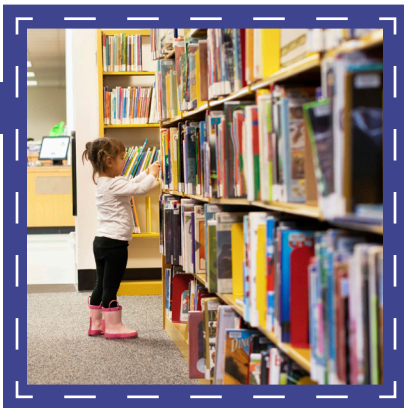
- include babies in everyday talk
- read books with baby
- engage babies with language-rich activities



TODDLER TALK

learn how to:

- talk to toddlers
- embed language learning in everyday interactions
- make the most of shared storytimes
- engage toddlers with language-rich activities



PRESCHOOL POWER

learn how to:

- use shared storytimes to boost early literacy skills
- teach kids their letters and phonemes
- encourage dramatic play that boosts language and literacy skills
- expand language skills with fun, age-appropriate activities



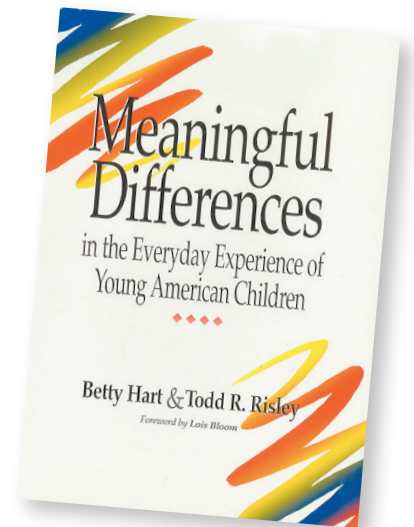
SPECIAL NEEDS & SUPPORTS

learn how to:

- recognize milestones, red flags, and next steps
- implement literacy and language supports for children with special needs
- construct literacy-rich preschool environments for all learners

read with me, talk with me.

Children who hear more words in their earliest years are better prepared when they enter school. That's a fact—and here's the book that proved it twenty years ago.



In this landmark study, Betty Hart & Todd Risley recorded parent-child spoken interactions in 42 families. They discovered that some children heard 30 million fewer words by their fourth birthdays than others (that's the **30 million word gap** you might have heard about). And followup studies at age 9 showed that the word gap has long-term consequences—big differences in children's early language experience were linked to big differences in later child outcomes.

Meaningful Differences has had a huge impact in the twenty years since Brookes published it, prompting followup studies and major projects like the Thirty Million Words® Initiative. The message is clear: early talk and interactions with children matter.

Shared reading matters, too—even the youngest child benefits so much from storytime with a caring adult. When children are exposed to books from a very early age, they learn that reading is important, and they start making the critical connections they need to develop their emerging literacy skills.

In this book, you'll discover helpful hints, tips, and activities on how to play, talk, and read with young children from birth to age 5. You'll get fun and easy ideas that help close the word gap, boost early language and literacy skills, and get the children you care for off to a great start in life.

let's get started!



baby
babbling

talk to me, baby.

“Babbling may seem like ‘just playing,’ but for babies it is also serious learning.”

—Betty Bardige, *Talk to Me, Baby!*



Early talk with babies is a fundamental building block of their success in school and life. On the next few pages, you'll learn how to:

- Include babies in everyday talk
- Read books with them (it's never too early!)
- Engage them with fun, language-rich activities

include babies in everyday talk

If you work with and care for babies, you play a very important part in their early language development. You probably already talk to the babies in your care as part of keeping them happy and engaged—but here are some other specific tips for taking their language development even further during everyday interactions. There are so many fun ways to include babies in your conversations, even when they're too young to talk back! And in childcare settings that include young children of different ages, including babies in everyday talk also helps you do two crucial things at once: meet their developmental needs while you care for and teach the older children.



Use the simple strategies on the next page to create a language-rich environment for babies—and all the children in your care will benefit.

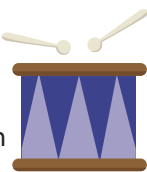
Including Babies *in* Conversations

12 TIPS

for Early Care Providers

1 Carry a young or tired infant in a sling, positioned so that he can watch the action and listen to the conversation, but turn away when he has had enough.

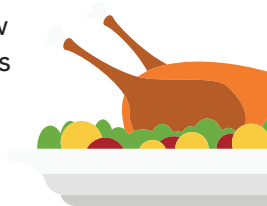
3 Give the baby rattles or shakers and encourage him to join the fun when older children are singing, dancing, and making music. Let the baby ride in or push a stroller to join toddlers and preschoolers in a marching band.



5 Make a protected pen or corral out of low furniture or pillows, where you can sit with one or two infants. Comment on what the older children are doing as you watch them together.

7 Show older children what the baby can do and engage them in helping to set up interesting challenges for him. Encourage them to talk to the baby.

9 Teach older children how to tell when the baby has had enough.



11 Include the baby in daily meals and special celebrations. Help other children to listen to the baby's babbles, repeat her sounds, and engage her in baby talk.

2 Hold the baby on your lap as you read to older children, but let her crawl away or play with other (quiet) toys if she loses interest.

4 Hold the baby on your lap as you watch older children put on a dramatic performance. Clap the baby's hands at appropriate times, and encourage her to cheer along with you.

6 Schedule one-to-one time with each child. In addition, use diaper changing and feeding routines as opportunities to share favorite songs, rhyming games, and intimate conversations. Ask older children to help by getting a toy or book for the baby or singing a song or nursery rhyme with you.



8 Help older children involve the baby in their play in appropriate ways. For example, they can offer her toy food from their pretend restaurant, let her ring the bell on their pretend train, or show her how to help with cleanup by wheeling trucks into a cardboard box garage or tossing toys into a bin.

10 Talk with older children about all of the things the baby is learning. Help them make laminated books about his favorite activities that they can read to him.

12 At the end of the day, as you transition the baby back to his family, talk about all of the things he has done with his friends.

Excerpted from *Talk to Me, Baby!*, Second Edition,
by Betty S. Bardige, Brookes Publishing Co.
www.brookespublishing.com

read books with baby

“Reading books with young children is one of the single most important things that adults can do to ensure children’s timely development of oral language and emergent literacy skills, both of which are necessary for success in school and, ultimately, in life.”

—Helen Ezell & Laura Justice,
Shared Storybook Reading

It’s never too early to read with a young child! Babies might not be able to read or even talk yet, but shared storytimes give them critical early exposure to the building blocks of language (and strengthen their bonds with the caring adults in their lives at the same time).



See the next page for a helpful tip sheet on how to read books with babies.



how to Read Books with a Baby

0-6 months

- ▶ Choose books made of sturdy cardboard, cloth, or soft plastic.
- ▶ Look for books with bold color schemes such as black/white or red/yellow. A baby's vision is not fully developed at this stage, so she'll respond best to high-contrasting colors.
- ▶ Hold books 10–12 inches from baby's face—vision and focus is best at this distance.
- ▶ Babies are hardwired to focus on faces—notice how baby studies pictures of faces.
- ▶ Label objects using *parentese*. Exaggerated, drawn-out speech helps infants absorb the phonetic elements of parents' language.
- ▶ Read and reread books for 5–15 minutes at least daily.

6-12 months

- ▶ Seek out books with simple illustrations and bold colors.
- ▶ Point to and label objects. After several readings, ask the baby to point to familiar objects: *Can you point to the ladybug?* This activity, called rehearsal, strengthens short-term memory.
- ▶ Use descriptive language for textures—*The blue blanket is so soft and fuzzy.*
- ▶ Read and reread books for 5–15 minutes, at least daily.
- ▶ Encourage the baby to reach out and touch the pages and enjoy reading as a tactile experience.

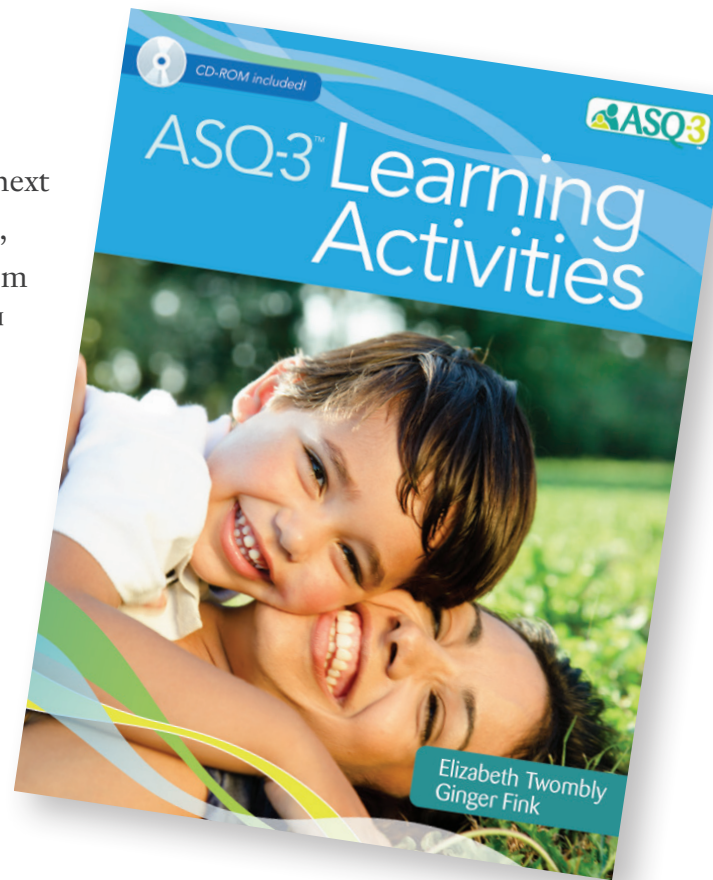
12-24 months

- ▶ Ask the child to name familiar objects on the page—prompt them with *What is this?* as you point to objects. Children experience a language explosion as short- and long-term memory develops.
- ▶ Look for stories with a clear beginning, middle, and end with interesting characters who are trying to solve a problem young children can relate to.
- ▶ Choose books that give children opportunities to directly interact with the pages—for example, sturdy lift-the-flap books and texture books.
- ▶ Encourage the child to hold the book and turn pages. This facilitates interest and attention span.
- ▶ Read and reread books for 10–15 minutes daily or as often as the child is interested.
- ▶ Be ready to hear “read it again!” a lot. That's normal—children love their favorite books and want to read them over and over again.

Adapted from *Developing Early Comprehension* by Andrea DeBruin-Parecki, Ph.D., Anne Van Kleeck, Ph.D., & Sabra Gear, Ph.D., Brookes Publishing Co.

engage babies with language-rich activities

Even from a child's earliest months, there are so many fun and easy activities you can do to promote early language development. On the next page, you'll find a timeline of 10 language-rich, age-appropriate activities to try with babies from birth-16 months. Excerpted from the *ASQ-3™ Learning Activities*, these activities are great for sharing with parents—but if you're a care provider, you can easily adapt them for use in your program, too.



A Timeline of Talk



Fun & Easy Activities *that* Boost Babies' Language Development

Birth-16 months

0-2 months

While baby is rested, relaxed, and looking at your face, softly say a long "oooooooo" sound. Watch how she reacts. When baby is a few weeks old, she may think your "ooooo" face is very interesting and try to make one, too. Soon baby will try to say "oooooooo" back.

0-2 months

Talk to your baby about her day and what's going to happen next. She doesn't know the words yet but will very soon. This will help your baby learn routines: "It's time for a nap." "It's time to eat."

2-4 months

With your baby cuddled on your lap, hold a book with simple, clear, colorful pictures so that both of you can see. You could also look at magazines, newspaper ads, or family photos. Talk softly about what you see as you point to the pictures. Baby will learn that reading time is very special.

2-4 months

When sounds happen around the house, help baby notice by talking about them: "I hear the phone ringing. I hear your brother calling."

4-8 months

As your baby begins to experiment with his voice, you will probably hear "ba," "mmm," and "da" and "ah," "ee," and "oo" sounds. Imitate the sounds baby makes. While you make the sound, let your baby put his fingers on your lips to feel the vibrations.

4-8 months

Your baby is discovering different body parts and probably has become very interested in his feet and hands. Encourage him by playing games with fingers and toes, such as "This Little Piggy." Talk about his body parts. When he touches his feet, say, "You found your feet!"

8-12 months

When baby is awake and alert, turn off the television and other household sounds so that he only hears your voice. This helps baby hear the sounds of words more clearly. Hum and sing just for baby's pleasure. Ask baby, "Can you hear a bird? Can you hear the rain?"

8-12 months

Your baby is learning to enjoy imitation. Encourage this by showing your baby how to play Follow the Leader. Use simple movements, such as tapping on the table or putting a hat on your head. Talk about what you are doing. Say, "It's your turn," and see if your baby will follow along.

12-16 months

While you do housework or get a meal together, talk to your baby about what you are doing. Encourage your little one to use two words together to make baby sentences, such as "Help me" or "More juice." This big language step will grow into a lot of talk.

12-16 months

Take baby to the supermarket with you so baby can "help." Talk about all of the colors and smells. Let baby hold something, such as a small can or a lemon. At the checkout, let baby "pay" the cashier. What a good helper!

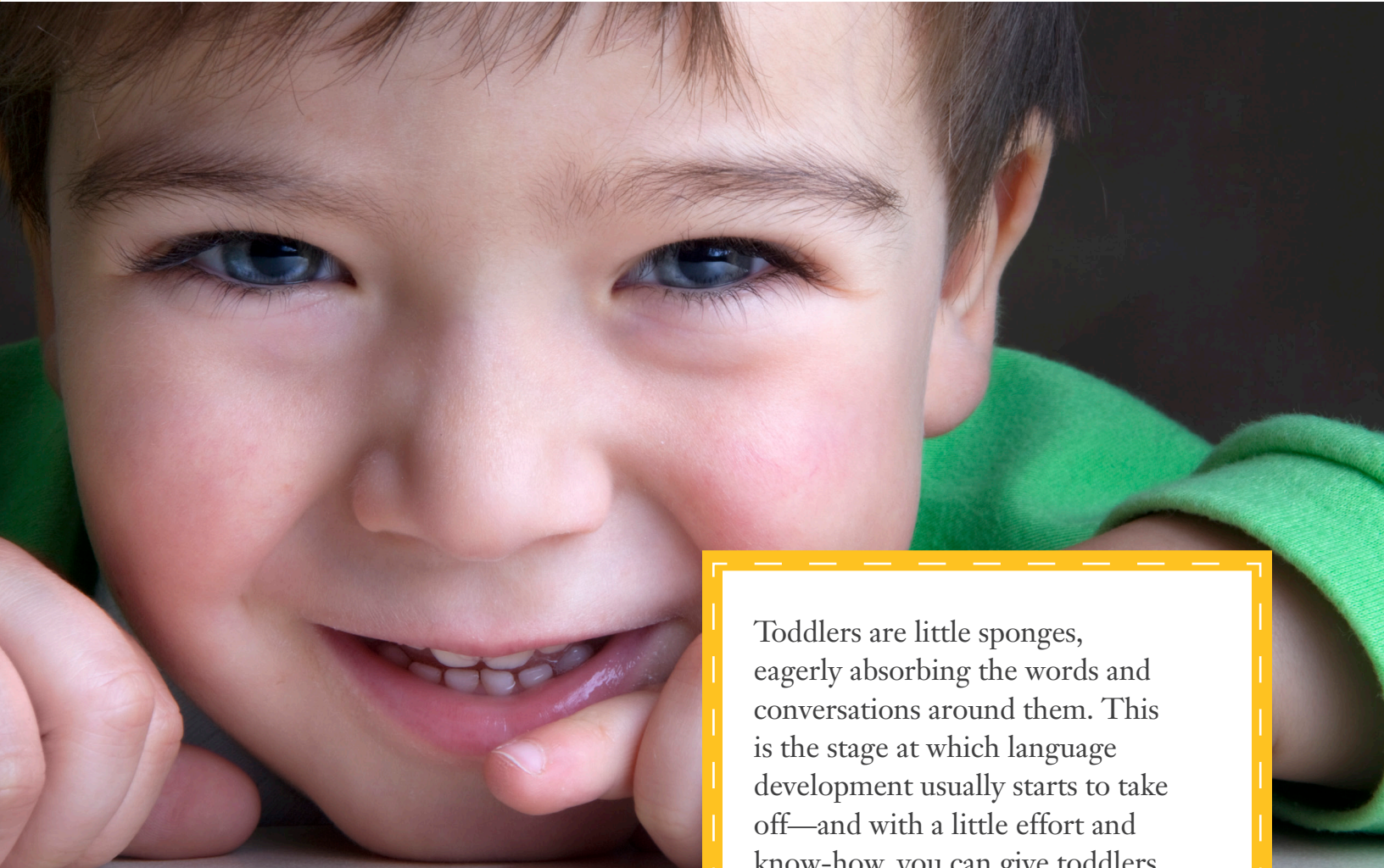
Don't forget, all activities should be safely supervised by an adult!

Adapted from ASQ-3™ Learning Activities
by Elizabeth Twombly, M.S., & Ginger Fink, M.A., Brookes Publishing Co.

toddler *talk*



now we're talking



Toddlers are little sponges, eagerly absorbing the words and conversations around them. This is the stage at which language development usually starts to take off—and with a little effort and know-how, you can give toddlers the kind of rich early language experiences they'll soon need to read, converse, and develop friendships.

In this section, you'll learn how to

- Talk to toddlers in an age-appropriate way
- Embed language learning in everyday interactions with toddlers
- Make the most of shared storytimes
- Engage toddlers with specific language-rich activities

how to talk to toddlers

“Conversation is a social dance that involves not just talking but also speaking and listening in partnership with another person.”

—Betty Hart & Todd Risley,
The Social World of Children Learning to Talk

According to landmark research by Hart & Risley, when parents “just talk” around the house as they go about their everyday routines, they expose their young children to more than 1,000 words an hour. This type of early language exposure is critical—but Hart & Risley also emphasize the importance of engaging in real conversation with children as their language skills start to take off. Opportunities to involve young kids in talk are all around you: a book, a favorite toy, a plane flying overhead, or even a routine chore can start great conversations that expand vocabulary and promote language skills.



See the next page for 12 key strategies
for talking effectively with toddlers.

12 Tips *for* Talking with Toddlers



1 Talk to the toddler on his level. Squat down or sit beside him. Comment on what he is doing or seeing. Offer him an intriguing object, or join his play by playing along, providing appropriate words or sound effects.

3 Narrate your own actions, thoughts, and feelings for the toddler (self talk). Pause frequently to ask for the child's input and give him a chance to respond.

5 Talk about a recent event that was special for the toddler. Use props or pictures to help him remember.

7 Sing favorite songs frequently, and encourage the toddler to join in. Listen for the point when gibberish turns into words. Pause before a key word in a song or rhyme to give the toddler a chance to fill it in all by herself.



9 Provide the toddler with many opportunities to practice using the words he knows. Read his favorite books over and over so that he can practice naming the pictures.

11 Repeat the toddler's communication in words. If you are unsure, ask for confirmation, giving him a chance to repeat the word or gesture or to correct your interpretation. Use complete but simple sentences.

2 Respond to the toddler's efforts to keep the conversation going. Whether she uses babble-talk, gibberish, sound effects, gestures, signs, or words, give her the words for what she seems to be trying to say, and pause so that she can repeat the word more clearly.

4 Provide a play-by-play description of the toddler's activity and perceptions, just as a sportscaster might comment on a player's actions. When the toddler looks at you with interest or chimes in with words or babbles, stop your narrative and give her a turn to talk.

6 Take breaks and breathers during conversations with young toddlers. Most need simple, short sentences and plenty of time to take in the information and formulate a response.

8 Respond to anything that sounds like a word and is used with communicative intent. For example, when a child who hears a plane overhead points to the sky and says, "Ane," you might answer, "I see the plane. The plane is high up in the sky."



10 Use words to help the toddler name and manage her strong emotions. "That was a loud noise. It made you scared." "You're angry because Sam took your toy."

12 Accompany language with gestures that the toddler can copy. Clap "hooray," nod "yes," shake your head "no," or wave "bye-bye."

Excerpted from *Talk to Me, Baby!, Second Edition*,
by Betty S. Bardige, Brookes Publishing Co.
www.brookespublishing.com

embed language learning in everyday interactions

Your everyday routines are packed with opportunities to help a toddler develop key language skills—from using different types of words to asking and answering questions. On the next page you'll find some simple suggestions you can start using right away to boost a toddler's language development at the store, in the bathtub, at bedtime, and more.



Language Development All Day Long

Tips for Boosting Key Language Skills during Everyday Routines



USING DIFFERENT TYPES OF WORDS

To help toddlers use different types of words such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives, try these strategies:



Community Outings: To help the child learn about verbs, say “go,” “shop,” and “drive” when out running errands. To help the child learn possession, talk about clothes or body parts while she’s riding in a shopping cart (e.g., *your shoes, my hair, her buttons*). As two-word combinations emerge, model a variety of meanings when combining words. For example, when outside for a walk, use descriptions like “pretty butterfly,” “pop bubble,” “cold water,” and “water flowers.”



Diapering and Dressing: While helping a child get dressed, describe your actions by saying “on” and “off.”



Playtime: Look at things that come in different shapes and sizes, such as a “big rock” and “little rock” or a “bumpy stick” and “smooth leaves.” Express common actions such as “boom” for falling or “pop” for bubbles.

USING PHRASES AND SENTENCES



To help children combine words to communicate more complex ideas, try these strategies:



Bath Time: While in the bath: use phrases to describe, for example, *hot water* or *all clean*.



Community Outings: When the child comes on errands, model verbs with tense markers. For example, if the child says “Daddy go,” model “going, going, going.” To incorporate possession, model context-based possession: “Daddy’s car” and “Trey’s seat.” Summarize the outing to model past tense: “We went to the store. Daddy bought paint.”



Mealtime/Snack Time: Describe foods for the child during meals to help him or her learn to comment on foods (“yellow corn and white potatoes”).



Playtime: Ask questions to help the child practice giving answers: “Who’s under the blanket? Is it Grandma?” The child might respond, “No! It’s me!” Add comments to help the child expand his or her vocabulary (“That was fun!” or “I’m tired!”).



Adapted from *Early Intervention Every Day!* by Merle J. Crawford, M.S., OTR/L, BCBA, CIMI, & Barbara Weber, M.S., CCC-SLP

3

ANSWERING QUESTIONS

To help children learn to respond to the questions they are asked, try these strategies:



Diapering and Dressing: Talk about where you're placing a clothing item to help the child answer questions about body parts and location. For example, say "Where should I put your shirt?" or "Where do your socks go?" Ask "What is that?" to prompt the child to name clothing.



Mealtime/Snack Time: Embed questions into the routine; for example, "Mom is going to make dinner. What should we eat?" "What does Mommy need to stir?" or "What is this?" (holding a pan). Practice verb answers by asking "What am I doing?" when stirring, washing dishes, or cutting vegetables.



Bedtime: Ask questions about activities done during the day. This will help the child be part of a conversation. For example, ask or say "We went to the zoo today," "Which animal did you like?" "Did you like the zoo?" "Who went with us to the zoo?" "We had popcorn. Do you like popcorn?"

ASKING QUESTIONS

4

To help children ask questions and gain new information about the world, try these strategies:



Book Time: Encourage the child to ask a sibling/caregiver which book the person wants to read.



Community Outings: Encourage the child to ask you what you liked about experiences, for example, after a trip to the zoo. Model the question, "What did you like?" Accept imperfect grammar; at this age it is common for children to say "What you like?" or "What like?"



Mealtime/Snack Time: When providing snacks, provide just a few items so the child will have an opportunity to ask for more.

5

BEING UNDERSTOOD

To help children develop speech sounds so they can be understood, try these strategies:



Bath Time: When taking a bath, the child might say words without all the sounds, for example, "ha" for "hot." Reinforce her efforts with "Yes! Hot!" and emphasize the missing sound. This helps to shape sound development by providing clear speech models.



Mealtime/Snack Time: When offering the child a snack, give him two options. If the child points to the preferred option and pronounces the word incorrectly—for example, the child points to cheese and says "dee"—comment as if he said "cheese" correctly. Say, "Cheese! I love cheese too," and model the word cheese slowly and clearly.



Playtime: When playing with toys, say simple, short word models to help the child learn about sounds in a word. For example, when cooking at a play stove, model "egg" and repeat "egg." When the child repeats "eh," model "egg!" emphasizing the last sound.

8 Easy Ways *to* Expand Toddler Talk



1 When the child repeats the same word types frequently (e.g., nouns), help her imitate more words that expand vocabulary.

2 If the child says one word, add one more. If he says “cookie,” you say “Want cookie. Sure you can have a cookie.”

3 Add grammar pieces to the child’s sentences, such as a plural /s/, an a, the, or ing. If the child says “kitty chair,” model “kitty on chair.”

4 Embed questions into a game to give the child opportunities to practice. For example, have the child call “Where are you?” or ask “What’s in there?” during a hiding game.

5 Add visual cues when a child is learning how to answer questions. Hold up items or objects that support the question you’re asking.

6 Slightly overemphasize any sounds that the child needs to work on. For example, if the child says “dod,” model “Dog. Yes, dog!”

7 Provide a clear word model to help the child imitate more accurately. For example, “Cat. You say, cat” may be more helpful than “What is this called?”

8 When children do not answer a question, model the answer to help them learn to respond appropriately over time. If you ask “Who is that?” and the child does not answer, model “It’s Grandma!”



Adapted from Early Intervention Every Day! by Merle J. Crawford, M.S., OTR/L, BCBA, CIMI, & Barbara Weber, M.S., CCC-SLP, Brookes Publishing, Co.

make the most of shared storytimes

“Books play many roles in the lives of 2-year-olds. They can be familiar friends, providing comfort and relaxation at bedtime or naptime, during times of stress or long waiting periods, or whenever a child needs a break for ‘refueling.’ Books are often sources of amusement or inspiration—and may give children ideas for active and imaginative play that continues beyond the book.”

—Betty Bardige, *Talk to Me, Baby!*



See the next page for tips on effective
shared storytimes with toddlers!

Shared Storytime *with toddlers*



1 Choose books tailored for their age level.

The storybooks that toddlers like best:

- ▶ Have colorful illustrations that are easy to identify and talk about
- ▶ Feature characters who behave like 2-year-olds and share their feelings
- ▶ Often tell reassuring stories about characters who are lost and then found, who run away and return, or who misbehave and are forgiven
- ▶ Introduce interesting, fun-to-say words
- ▶ Have parts that children can imitate in pretend play
- ▶ Help children to be "experts" on favorite topics
- ▶ Have easy-to-follow patterns, sometimes with a twist at the end

2 Discuss and reread.

- ▶ Discuss the story with the child. Ask her questions, such as "What did the caterpillar do?"
- ▶ Young children love to have stories reread to them. If you are rereading a story, ask the child to recall the storyline or details about the story before you read it: "Do you remember what the bear does next?"

3 Talk about details.

- ▶ Look for books designed to encourage toddlers' participation, with textures to touch, flaps to peek under, sounds to imitate, and more.
- ▶ Invite the child to stand up and act out the words.
- ▶ Encourage the toddler to choose which pages to play with and which pictures to talk about.
- ▶ Let the child turn pages by herself.

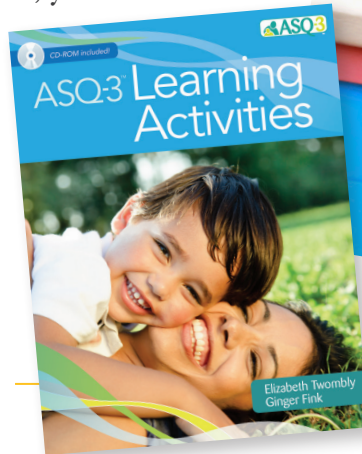
4 Encourage interaction with the book and story.

- ▶ For toddlers, talking about specific details in picture books helps expand language skills.
- ▶ When looking at a book with a 2-year-old, ask him to identify things in the pictures. Begin by asking him, "Where is [the dog]?"
- ▶ Choose another simple item in the picture and ask the child to point to the item you have chosen.
- ▶ Continue by asking him to identify other items in the picture.
- ▶ Later, ask him to tell you what is pictured on the page by asking him, "What's this?"

1 and 4 adapted from *Talk to Me, Baby!*, Second Edition, by Betty S. Bardige, Brookes Publishing Co.
2 and 3 adapted from *Beautiful Beginnings* by Helen H. Raikes, Brookes Publishing Co.

engage toddlers with language-rich activities

As toddlers' language skills expand exponentially, look for new language-rich activities that keep their skills growing. On the next page, you'll find a timeline of 9 age-appropriate activities to try with toddlers from ages 2-3. Excerpted from the *ASQ-3™ Learning Activities*, these activities are great for sharing with parents—but if you're a care provider, you can adapt them for use in your program, too.



A Timeline of Talk



Fun & Easy Activities *that* Boost Toddlers' Language Development

Ages 2-3

16-20 months

Your toddler may use single words for requests, such as "juice" when he wants a drink. Help him stretch his sentence by saying it for him: "Would you like some juice? Say, 'I want juice, please.'" Praise him when he attempts to make the sentence longer.

16-20 months

When you get home from an outing, ask your toddler to tell someone else about what happened or what the two of you saw: "Tell Grandpa about the horse we saw." Help if you need to, but let her tell as much as she can.

20-24 months

Put your hand in a clean sock and make it talk: "Hi, my name is José. I am visiting you. What is your name?" Your child might say something or want to touch the puppet. Keep the conversation going. Let the puppet give your toddler a kiss!

24-30 months

Make a little album with pictures of your child and the people and pets he knows. Have your child talk about the pictures and name the people and pets. Ask your child, "Who's that? What are they doing?" Look at this book over and over. Help your child learn to say her first and last name.

24-30 months

Turn off the television and other electronics, and listen with your child to sounds around your home. Listen to the refrigerator motor, wind chimes, a clock ticking, or people talking. Ask your child to tell you what she hears.

16-20 months

Put together a treasure box of everyday items that are interesting to explore and feel—plastic cups, a soft sock, a little ball, a hairbrush, a small shoe. When your child pulls something out of the box, say, "Look, you found a soft blue sock" or "That sponge is squishy." Use new language for your child, and change items in the box every few days.

20-24 months

Teach your child words about the car during the day. Talk about what you're doing: "Let's *open* the car door and get inside. I'm going to *buckle* your car seat. Daddy's going to *close and lock* the door. Do you hear the *motor*? Let's go!" Soon your little rider will know all about the car.

20-24 months

Collect materials to make a pretend airport, street, or neighborhood. Masking tape can be the runway or the road. Oatmeal containers can be tunnels. Cereal boxes can be buildings. Cardboard can make a ramp for cars to go *up/down*. Toy cars can go *through* the tunnel, *under* the bridge, or *beside* a building. Use these new words while your child builds and plays.

24-30 months

Let your child wash a baby doll in a plastic tub, or bring a baby doll into his bath. Name the doll's body parts as he washes the baby: "You're washing the baby's hands." Let your child know what a good job he is doing taking care of the baby.

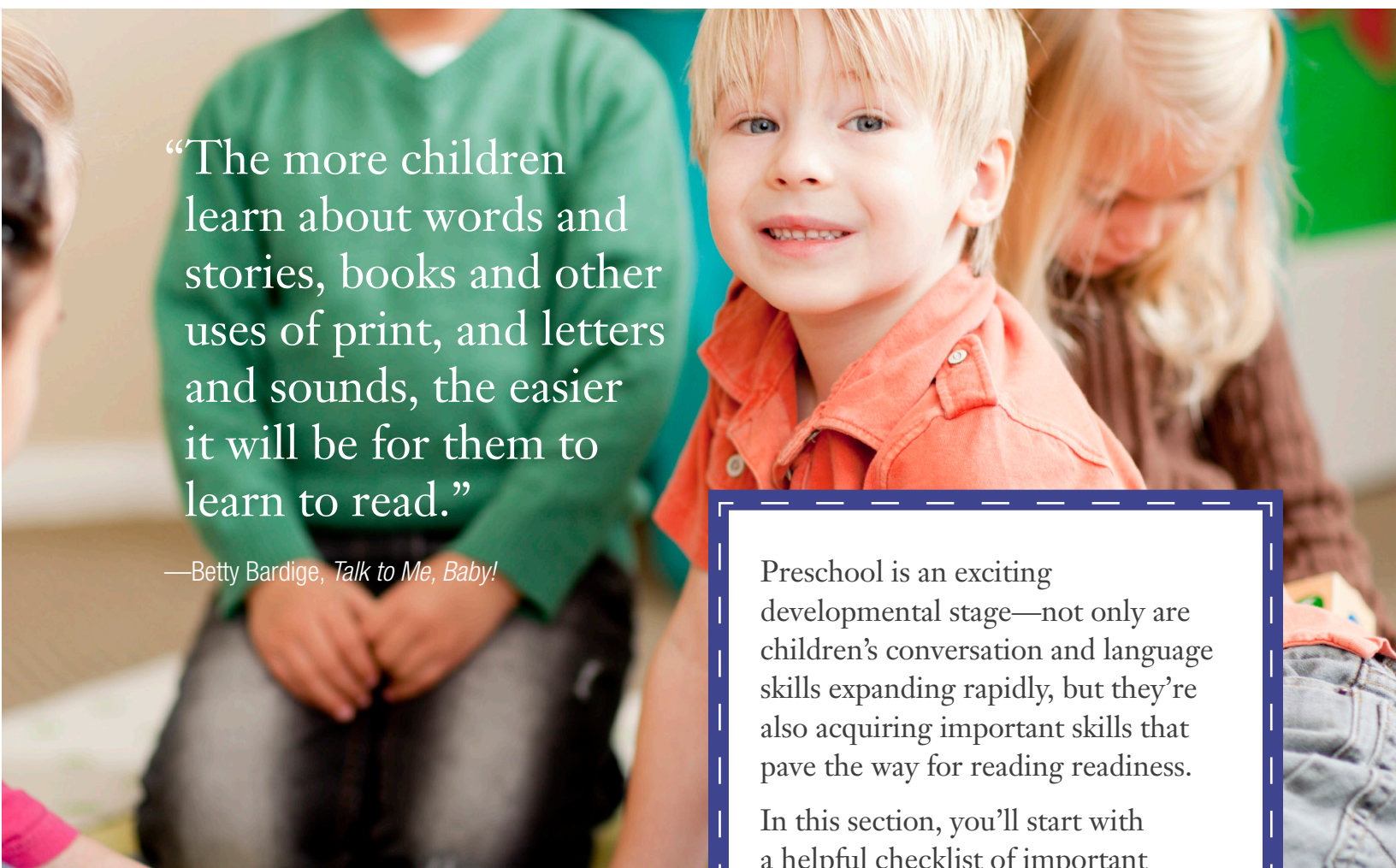
Don't forget, all activities should be safely supervised by an adult!

Adapted from ASQ-3™ Learning Activities
by Elizabeth Twombly, M.S., & Ginger Fink, M.A., Brookes Publishing Co.



preschool
power

getting ready to read



“The more children learn about words and stories, books and other uses of print, and letters and sounds, the easier it will be for them to learn to read.”

—Betty Bardige, *Talk to Me, Baby!*

Preschool is an exciting developmental stage—not only are children’s conversation and language skills expanding rapidly, but they’re also acquiring important skills that pave the way for reading readiness.

In this section, you’ll start with a helpful checklist of important elements that expand preschoolers’ language skills and support early literacy in preK classrooms. Then you’ll learn tips to help you:

- Use shared storytimes to boost early literacy skills
- Teach kids their letters and phonemes
- Encourage dramatic play that boosts language and literacy skills
- Expand language skills with fun, age-appropriate activities



Checklist of Important Elements *for* Supporting Early Literacy

Availability of learning materials

	At least five picture books per child
	Three-dimensional alphabet letters
	Variety of writing implements (crayons, pencils, markers, colored pencils) and paper
	Games, materials, and activities to help children learn to name and print alphabet letters
	Games, materials, and activities to help children learn to rhyme
	Cozy and comfortable area where children can look at books of their own choice
	Separate area with table or other surface readily available for writing

Checklist of Important Elements *for* Supporting Early Literacy

continued

Availability of early literacy learning opportunities

	Adults read aloud to children at least once a day
	Teacher introduces new words to children while reading picture books
	Teacher sometimes sounds out printed words when reading picture books and sometimes points to text while reading aloud
	Teacher encourages children to scribble and experiment with pretend writing
	Teacher has detailed and informative conversations with children about things that interest them (e.g., "How do you think ice cream is made?")
	Teacher encourages children to talk about their experiences
	Teacher helps children learn nursery rhymes
	Teacher encourages children to express themselves using complete sentences
	Teacher keeps a record of how individual children are progressing in their early literacy learning
	Teacher believes in the importance of helping young children gain early literacy knowledge
	Teacher engages children in games and activities that focus on phonological awareness (e.g., "Clap your hands for every sound you hear in po-ta-to")
	Teacher helps children learn to write their own and others' names
	Teacher regularly helps children learn the sounds the alphabet letters represent (e.g., "M makes the mmmm sound")
	Classroom day includes some planned teaching activities in which all children are expected to engage in literacy activities

Excerpted from Building Blocks for Teaching Preschoolers with Special Needs, Second Edition, by Susan R. Sandall & Ilene S. Schwartz, Brookes Publishing Co.

use shared storytimes to boost early literacy

“The beauty of storybook reading is that young children can learn a multitude of concepts through this one activity.”

—Helen Ezell & Laura Justice,
Shared Storybook Reading

Storytimes with preschoolers still provide great opportunities for bonding with children, teaching new words, and expanding language development. At this stage, shared storybook reading is also a critical strategy for advancing early literacy skills. On the next few pages, you'll find strategies for promoting print awareness and phonological awareness as you read books with preschoolers. You'll also find tips for pairing storybooks with nonfiction texts to help kids learn new vocabulary and concepts in key areas like math and science.



how to

Use Shared Reading

to Promote Emergent Literacy



PRINT AWARENESS

Use shared storytimes to help children:

- ▶ **Recognize that print is different from pictures.** You can do this by tracking the print in the storybook with your finger as you read, or explicitly stating the difference: "Here's a picture that shows what's happening in the story"; "These are the words that tell the story."
- ▶ **Understand print directionality.** To communicate the sequence in which pages are read, say, "I read this page first [point to the left page], and I read this one next [point to the right page]." To communicate the left-to-right orientation of words, say "I start reading here [point to the first word on a line] and go this way [move a finger in a left-to-right motion under the words]."
- ▶ **Identify the top and bottom of a page.** Say, "I start reading up here [track the first line of print], and then I go to the next line [track left to right under the second line]. I read each one until I come to the bottom [move a finger down the page to the bottom line]. I read each page from top to bottom."
- ▶ **Realize that print tells a story.** Point to the print and explain to the child, "These are the words that tell this story." Check for understanding by saying, "Show me which part tells the story," or asking, "What do these words do?"
- ▶ **Identify the first letter in his or her name.** Select a book that contains several words that begin with the uppercase form of this letter. Show the child a written example of the letter and say you'll be looking for it as you read. Interrupt the story periodically and ask "Can you point to the letter M in this word?"
- ▶ **Learn some letters of the alphabet.** Select a letter used at least three times in a storybook. Show the child a written example of the letter and say you'll be looking for it. Interrupt the story on two or three occasions and ask, "Can you put your finger on the letter T in this word?"
- ▶ **Understand that words are made up of letters.** Select a few words in a storybook that contain two or three letters. If possible, pick words with at least one letter the child already knows. Interrupt the story and point to one of the selected words. Ask "How many letters are in this word?" and help the child point to the letters as he or she counts.
- ▶ **Identify the space between two words.** In a storybook, find two short words next to each other (in here, to the). Point to the two words selected and cover the surrounding words. Ask the child, "How many words do you see here?" Help the child count them, and say "There's a little space between these two words to keep them apart. Can you put your finger on that space?" Direct the child's finger to point to the space between the words.
- ▶ **Point to words individually as they are read by an adult.** Select a page in a storybook that contains at least one page where there are only one or two lines of print. Ask the child, "Can you point to the words on this page as I read each one?" Reading at a slower pace, guide the child's finger for the first several words and then let the child continue independently.

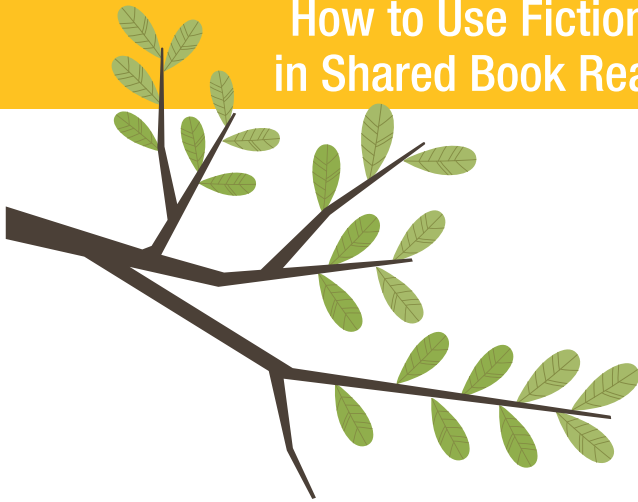
- ▶ **Recognize word boundaries.** Select a single word, a two-word phrase, and a three-word phrase from a familiar storybook. Before reading begins, tell the child: “When I say the word bed, I am saying one word, so I clap once. (clap once). When I say (pause) my bed, that is two words, so I clap two times. (clap twice) Now you try it.” When the words and phrases you chose appear in the book, pause and say to the child, “Listen closely and tell by clapping how many words you hear.”
- ▶ **Identify the number of syllables in words.** Choose two pairs of words on a storybook page: a one-syllable word and a three-syllable word. Interrupt shared reading when the first word pair appears and say, “Listen carefully as I say two words from the story. I want you to tell me which word has more parts. Ready?” Quietly clap once as you say house and three times as you say eve-ry-one. Then let the child identify which one has more syllables.
- ▶ **Rhyme words by changing the first sound.** Select a storybook that contains one word that rhymes with at least two other words by changing the initial sound (e.g., tea/sea/key, tell/bell/fell). During shared reading, make a comment like, “This word tea sounds like the word sea. The words tea and sea rhyme, which means that they sound the same except for the first sound. Tea starts with a ‘tuh’ sound, and sea starts with a ‘sss’ sound. Can you think of another word that rhymes with tea and sea?”
- ▶ **Identify the first sound of words.** Select a target consonant sound that the child is able to say without any difficulty, such as the /t/ phoneme. Pick a book that contains this sound at the beginning of three different words, avoiding words with consonant clusters (e.g., try, twine). During reading, provide a brief explanation and an example using the target word: “All words are made of sounds. When I say a word, listen to the first sound and tell me what you hear. When I say the word to, you hear the ‘tuh’ sound. Can you hear the ‘tuh’ in the word to?” Then explain that some other words in the story begin with this sound, and resume reading.

Remember to:

- Give lots of praise for the child's correct responses and provide assistance for incorrect answers.
- Praise the child's attempts to answer and participate even if he needed guidance with the whole task.
- Continue practicing tasks until the child is able to do them with little or no assistance.
- Consider what works for the child—there are many different ways to teach the features of alphabet letters, print conventions, and sounds. What works for one child may not work for another.
- Look for natural opportunities throughout the day to discuss these concepts with young children (e.g., when children sign their names to their artwork or look at a classroom calendar).

Twin Texts

How to Use Fiction & Nonfiction Together in Shared Book Reading with Preschoolers



To teach important vocabulary words and concepts in key content areas like social studies and science, pair storybooks with nonfiction books (informational texts) that expand on concepts explored in the stories.

Why read informational texts to preschoolers? Aren't they too young for books like that?

Many teachers don't use twin texts (informational texts read along with storybooks), fearing that the complex concepts will go over their students' heads. But there are lots of great nonfiction books written just for children—and some experts even suggest that kids may prefer informational texts, because they tap into their natural curiosity about the world. There's also some evidence that young children who participate in discussions about informational text may become better informational writers later in school.*

Tips on choosing “twin texts”

- Make sure the facts presented in the twin texts are consistent and don't contradict each other.
- Ensure that illustrations and visuals across the two books are connected to the book content and include clarifying details in both texts. Storybook illustrations, for example, can clarify a character's actions, while pictures in informational (nonfiction) texts should accurately depict behavior patterns (e.g., the butterfly life cycle) with clearly presented diagrams.
- Look for book pairs with related content vocabulary that will be important for students' later academic learning.
- Select storybooks that have visuals to help children understand the sequence of the story and make predictions.
- Choose informational books that present facts clearly without complicated explanations, long sentences, or overly simplified concepts.
- Make sure storybooks and informational texts contain clear illustrations, pictures, or photographs, depicting important concepts and words.
- Select storybooks and informational books that feature target vocabulary words and concepts multiple times.
- Consider selecting twin texts one grade level above the students' current placement to expose them to text structures and vocabulary important for later learning.



Next pages: a sample schedule and suggested “twin text” pairings!

Sample schedule for teaching twin texts

Day 1	Read and discuss the storybook for the first time, introducing new thematic concepts and words.
Day 2	Read the storybook again to review, discuss, and extend children's understanding of previously taught information.
Day 3	Read the informational text, introducing new thematic concepts and words.
Day 4	Read the informational text again to review, discuss, and extend children's understanding of previously taught information.
Day 5	Cumulatively review the concepts, theme, and topic using both the storybook and the informational text.



With this 5-day schedule, teachers with limited classtime can easily distribute vocabulary instruction across their lessons, in just 15–20 minutes a day.



Suggested “twin text” pairings

Continued



For a complete guide to using twin texts in your lessons, see *Accelerating Language Skills and Content Knowledge Through Shared Book Reading*.

TOPIC	STORYBOOK	INFORMATIONAL TEXT
LIGHT	 <p>Asch, F. (1999). <i>Moonbear's shadow</i>. New York, NY: Aladdin Books.</p>	 <p>Parker, V. (2006). <i>Light</i>. Chicago, IL: Heinemann Library.</p>
PLANTS AND GARDENS	 <p>Brennan, A. (2006). <i>Mr. Greg's garden</i>. New York, NY: National Geographic Society.</p>	 <p>Jordan, H.J. (2006). <i>How a seed grows</i>. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers.</p>
HOMES	 <p>Arnold, T. (1987). <i>No jumping on the bed!</i> New York, NY: Puffin Books.</p>	 <p>Schaefer, L.M. (2003). <i>House</i>. Chicago, IL: Heinemann Library.</p>

Adapted from *Accelerating Language Skills and Content Knowledge Through Shared Book Reading* by Sharolyn Pollard-Durodola, Ed.D., Jorge Gonzalez, Ph.D., Deborah C. Simmons, Ph.D., & Leslie Simmons, M.Ed., Brookes Publishing Co.

*Citations for this paragraph are from chapter 4 of *Accelerating Language Skills and Content Knowledge Through Shared Book Reading*: Duke, N.K. (2003). Reading to learn from the very beginning: Information books in early childhood. *Young Children*, 58,14–20. Neuman, S.B., & Roskos, K. (2007). *Nurturing knowledge*. New York, NY: Scholastic. Duke, N.K., & Bennett-Armistead, V.S. (2003). *Reading and writing informational text in the primary grades*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

teach kids their letters and phonemes

On the next few pages, you'll find fun activities you can use to help teach children the building blocks of literacy—foundational skills they'll use for the rest of their lives. Use these simple games and activities to:

- teach preschoolers their letters
- raise children's print awareness
- help children learn the 4 components of phonological awareness: rhyming, syllable awareness, knowledge of words and sentences, and phonemic awareness



Now I Know My ABCs

9 Ways to Teach Preschoolers Their Letters & Raise Print Awareness

1 Name Poems. Simple Name Poems are a catchy way to teach kids how to spell their names. Here's an example: "J-O-C-E-L-Y-N/That's how you spell Jocelyn!" Create a name poem for each child. Read several in class and have the child repeat the poem with you. Then visit with each child individually during small-group activities to teach them their name poems.

3 Print Scavenger Hunt. Point out that letters appear on many things besides books. Then give children about five minutes to look around the classroom and identify things that have print on them, such as cubby labels, wall displays, memos, envelopes, and school supplies labels.

5 Name Necklaces. Create an uppercase Name Necklace for each child in the class, print each child's first name in *uppercase* letters on *both* sides of stiff stock (e.g., half of a 3" x 5" index card), and add string to make a necklace. Distribute the

Name Necklaces and have the children put them on. Ask them what they see on the cards and make sure they all understand the necklaces are printed with their names. Have them check out the letters in each other's names. Explain that if they want to see their own names, they can hold out their Name Necklaces and look at the printing on the back of the card.

7 Sing It Soft, Sing It Loud. This game is just like Sing as I Point, but it's a little livelier. Ask the children to sing the letter name in their soft, gentle voices when you point to any letter with your pinkie, and use their loud, booming voices when you point to letters with your thumb.

9 Alphabet Bounce. During times when your students have energy to spare, sing the alphabet as a class to the tune of "Jimmy Crack Corn" and have the kids jump to the beat. Sing it a few times, going a little faster each time. This will help children learn to hear individual letters as they sing them—and it's a fun way to burn off excess energy.



2 Exploring Print. Bring in different types of books—illustrated children's storybooks, nonfiction books for kids, and print-intensive books such as *Harry Potter*—and show children the print inside them.

Explain that learning the alphabet is an important part of learning to read, and that once children know how to read, they can discover all types of stories and learn about anything they want.



4 Alphabet Books. Read a colorful, engaging alphabet book with your class to introduce and reinforce each letter in order. (One of our favorites is Paula Kluth's *A is for All Aboard*, a train-themed alphabet book with beautiful uncluttered artwork. It's designed especially for kids with autism, though it's fun and appropriate for all young children.)

6 Sing as I Point. The goal of this game is to get children to think about the alphabet as a set of separate letters. Ask your students to sing the Alphabet Song as you point to the letters, and explain that they should not sing any letter until you actually point to it. Lift your finger away between letters, moving it slowly from letter to letter, prompting the children to leave real space between the letter names as they sing them. Vary the pace unpredictably when you repeat this game. (You can use this game to teach both uppercase and lowercase letters.)

8 Uppercase Letter Draw. Divide children into small groups and give each group a sturdy strip of paper or cardboard with the alphabet printed clearly on it. Each group should also get a stack of shuffled cards, each with a different uppercase letter on it. Group members can take turns drawing cards and placing them over the corresponding letter on the alphabet strip. When a group finishes placing all of the cards, the members should sing the "Alphabet Song," pointing to each letter, until you come to check their work.

Find complete activities and many more ideas in the book behind this tip sheet: *ABC Foundations in Young Children* by Marilyn Adams, Brookes Publishing Co.

11 Fun Activities for Boosting Young Children's Phonological Awareness

Try these tips for teaching the 4 components of phonological awareness: rhyming, syllable awareness, knowledge of words and sentences, phonemic awareness.

1 Block It (Syllables).

Explain that syllables are parts of words. Demonstrate by pushing out a block for each word part as you say a word. Return the blocks to a pile before trying the next word. Give each child small paper squares instead of blocks to use at their desk for a group activity. Have a prepared list of words to dictate for the practice. You may want to use vocabulary from one of your areas of study.

3 On My Way to the Store (Rhyme).

Have the students sit in a circle and provide something to toss, such as a small ball or beanbag. To begin the game, say, "I was on my way to the store to buy some cheese," then toss the ball to a student. The student must repeat the phrase and add a rhyming word at the end, such as "I was on my way to the store to buy some peas (or trees, fleas, bees, knees, and so forth)." The student should then toss the ball back to the teacher, who repeats the original phrase with a new rhyming word (e.g., "I was on my way to the store to buy some jam (or ham, Sam, Pam, ram)"). Keep the pace moving quickly so children do not lose interest.

5 Hearing Words in Sentences (Knowledge of Words and Sentences).

Give each child six or seven ordinary blocks, interlocking cubes, or squares of heavy paper, which they will use to represent the words in a sentence that you produce—one block for each word. Model the required thought process for the children, showing them how to repeat your sentences to themselves word by word with clear pauses between each. Also encourage the children to arrange the blocks from left to right so that they begin to establish directionality. After arranging their blocks, the group should be asked to repeat your sentence, pointing to each block while pronouncing the word it represents.

2 Take One Thing from the Box (Syllables).

Collect a number of objects in a box or basket. Make sure to include objects that differ from one another in the number of syllables in their name. Invite one student to close her or his eyes, choose an object from the container, and name it (e.g., "This is a pencil"). All of the children should repeat the chosen object's name as they clap out its syllables. Then ask how many syllables were heard, taking care not to let anyone call out the answer too soon.

4 The Ship is Loaded with... (Rhyme).

Seat the children in a circle, and make sure you have something to toss, such as a ball or a beanbag. To begin the game, say, "The ship is loaded with cheese." Then toss the ball to somebody in the circle. This person must produce a rhyme (e.g., "The ship is loaded with peas") and throw the ball back to you. Repeating your original rhyme, then toss the ball to another child. Continue the game in this way until the children run out of rhymes. Then begin the game again with new cargo.



6

Animal Names (Phonemic Awareness).

Use animal picture cards or photos cut from magazines. Give students pictures and ask them to name the animals. Ask, "What sound do you hear at the beginning of that animal's name?" If students have also worked on final sounds, the teacher may ask, "What sound do you hear at the end of that animal's name?" This idea could be expanded with more pictures and could be "played" in centers with pairs of students.

8

Basic Three-Sound Words (Phoneme Isolation & Identity).

Give yourself and each of the children three blocks. Start by saying a two-sound word (e.g., *ice*) in two clearly separate parts, "ī . . . s," asking the children to repeat what you have said. All the children should then represent the word with two blocks of different colors to show that it consists of two sounds. Next explain that words may consist of more than two sounds. To demonstrate, say the word *rice*, "r . . . ī . . . s," and ask the children to repeat the word in unison. To represent the third phoneme, place a new block to the left of the two other blocks, pronouncing the whole word, phoneme by phoneme, as you point to each block in turn from left to right.

7

Guess Who? (Phonemic Awareness).

With children seated in a circle, say "Guess whose name I'm going to say now." Then secretly choose the name of one of the students and distinctly enunciate its initial phoneme only. For names beginning with a stop consonant, such as David, the phoneme should be repeated over and over, clearly and distinctly: "/d/ /d/ /d/ /d/ /d/." Continuant consonants should be stretched and repeated (e.g., "/s-s-s-s/ /s-s-s-s/ /s-s-s-s/ /s-s-s-s/"). If more than one child's name has the same initial sound, encourage children to guess all of the possibilities. This introduces the point that every phoneme shows up in lots of different words.

9

Silly Words (Phoneme Isolation & Identity).

Give the children a sound and have them replace the sound at the beginning of their names or any other desired words. The teacher may say, "The silly sound is /b/. Change the first sound in your name to /b/," such that *Mary* becomes *Barry* and *Sam* becomes *Bam*.

10

Robot Talk (Phoneme Blending).

Say a word stretched out with every phoneme separated by about a second of time. The students then repeat the word back to you as a whole unit. For example, when the teacher says, "/b/.../l/.../a/.../ck/," the students respond, "Black!"

11

Head-Waist-Toes (Phoneme Segmentation).

This is a great activity to help students identify internal sounds. Say a three-sound word, such as *mitt*. Students then stand and touch their heads while saying the first sound (/m/), waists while saying the second sound (/i/), and toes while saying the final sound (/t/). Then touch your waist again while saying, "What sound?" Continue to elicit the sounds in positions that students need help identifying.



Activities in green excerpted and adapted from *Next STEPS in Literacy Instruction* by Susan M. Smartt & Deborah R. Glaser, Brookes Publishing Co.

Activities in yellow excerpted and adapted from *Phonemic Awareness in Young Children* by Marilyn Adams, Brookes Publishing Co.

encourage dramatic play

Dramatic play activities are a great way to enhance children's language and emergent literacy skills. Through fun and engaging activities that cost nothing, dramatic play*:

- Expands children's knowledge of the world, which may help support later reading comprehension
- Helps children learn new vocabulary, a critical part of reading knowledge
- Increases print awareness when props incorporate written and printed materials
- Offers children many diverse opportunities for talk and interaction with their peers and the teacher



One the next page, you'll find 8 helpful tips on introducing language- and literacy-rich dramatic play activities to preschoolers.

**Adapted from Early Literacy in Action by Betty H. Bunce, Ph.D., CCC-SLP, Brookes Publishing Co.*

Start Some Drama!



▶ 7 TIPS on dramatic play activities that boost language learning ◀

1 Introduce the theme.

Model or act out portions of a dramatic play activity ahead of time, including children in the action whenever possible. Videos or books are good ways to teach children about unfamiliar themes while enhancing their language learning. Consider inviting guest speakers, such as parents, to demonstrate activities using props, vocabulary words, and actions—a beautician, for example, could explain how to wash and cut hair using a doll.

3 Get kids on a role.

When initiating dramatic play activities, make sure there are lots of different roles available. When kids play “house,” for example, there might be parents, children, neighbors, and pets. Having a variety of roles in a particular dramatic play is important because it allows many different children to play together.

5 Act the part.

Through verbal exchanges during the activity, you can provide models for the content, form, and use of language. Be sure to use the props and act the part. For example, you might drive your “car” to the child “mechanic” and say “My car needs to be fixed. I think it needs a new battery.” After she fixes your car, you can switch roles with the child to provide models for other types and forms of responses.

7 Remember: watching is learning, too.

Some children may not want to participate in dramatic play, or may want to watch before they decide. Support and encourage observational learning, and don’t require direct responses from children. Letting kids sit out or watch an activity gives them control over their participation, which helps them stay motivated to learn.

2 Give 'em props.

Props are an important part of bringing a dramatic play activity to life, teaching kids new words, and exposing them to print. Encourage emergent literacy skills by choosing activities and using props that incorporate print. Some examples: a restaurant activity using signs and menus, grocery-store play using tags and labels, a motel theme using a sign-in register, an office scene using old computer keyboards and notebooks, and library play using shelves of books and pretend library cards.

4 Look for literacy opportunities.

Even if the dramatic play activity isn’t literacy-focused, you can introduce opportunities for literacy practice as children play. For example, during a dramatic play activity with a babysitting theme, encourage the “babysitter” to read a book to “baby.” Or if the theme is Art Show, suggest that the kids make signs advertising the show.

6 Mix it up.

Children may become so familiar with a particular dramatic play that they become bored with it. Add novelty—and new words—to familiar dramatic play by adding new or different props or a new focus to the activity. For example, instead of just fishing, children might go ice fishing or go on a picnic where fishing is just one of the activities.

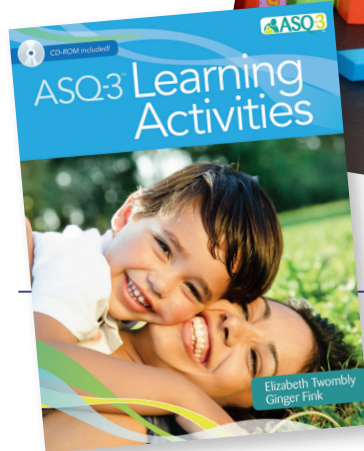


Adapted from *Early Literacy in Action*
by Betty H. Bunce, Ph.D., CCC-SLP,
Brookes Publishing Co.

expand language skills with fun activities

Preschoolers love fun, engaging activities that let them show off their expanding language skills and learn new words (especially silly ones!). On the next page, you'll find a timeline of 10 age-appropriate activities to try with preschoolers from ages 3-4.

Excerpted from the *ASQ-3™ Learning Activities*, these activities are great for sharing with parents to boost the home-school connection. But if you're an early childhood educator, you can adapt them for use in your classroom, too.



A Timeline of Talk



Fun & Easy Activities that Boost Preschoolers' Language Development

Ages 3-4

30-36 months

Have your child help you put away things like food or folded laundry. Use words such as *up*, *down*, *over*, or *through*: "Please put the can *on* the shelf" or "Please put your socks *in* the drawer." Thank them for the help! You can give silly directions, too: "Put the lemons *under* the chair."

30-36 months

Your child will have fun when you act silly. Pretend you don't know what things really are. Point to the toothpaste and ask, "Is that the soap?" Let him tell you what it really is. Act surprised. Your child will enjoy "teaching" you the right name of things.

36-42 months

Put little notes to your child here and there: "You are a very helpful brother to your baby sister," "I noticed you put your toys away," "Dad will read your favorite story at bedtime." Read these notes to your little one so that he learns reading is fun and important.

36-42 months

Go for a walk outside and look for living things. Ask your child questions about the world around her. "Where do we see birds?" Up in the sky. "Where do bugs live?" Under rocks. Your child may need a little help at first, but soon she will know the answers.

42-48 months

Encourage your child to begin to make up stories of her own. Write them on a piece of paper as she tells them to you. She might like to draw or paint a picture to go along with the story. You can put these stories in a folder to make a book titled, "My Own Stories."

42-48 months

Riding the bus or in the car, look for things in a certain category. Find things with wheels, things that are tall, or things of different colors. Choose the category or let your child pick. You might say, "Let's see how many animals we see."

48-54 months

Challenge your child to remember and do three things in a single direction. Ask your child to go into the bathroom, flush the toilet, and bring your toothbrush.

48-54 months

Go outside and lie on your back and take turns pointing out different cloud shapes and patterns. Ask your child what the clouds look like: "Look. There's an ice cream cone! What do you see?"

54-60 months

Set up an office for your child with notebooks, a toy phone, an old keyboard, pencils and pens, a ruler, a calculator, and a calendar. Encourage her to pretend to go to work, write letters, type messages, and make notes. Pretend with her. Call on the phone and ask questions.

54-60 months

When the moon is visible, find a place to look at the moon and stars with your child. Explore your child's imagination: "What do you see? Can you connect the stars to make a picture? What do you think it is like on the moon? How would you feel about being so far away from Earth?"

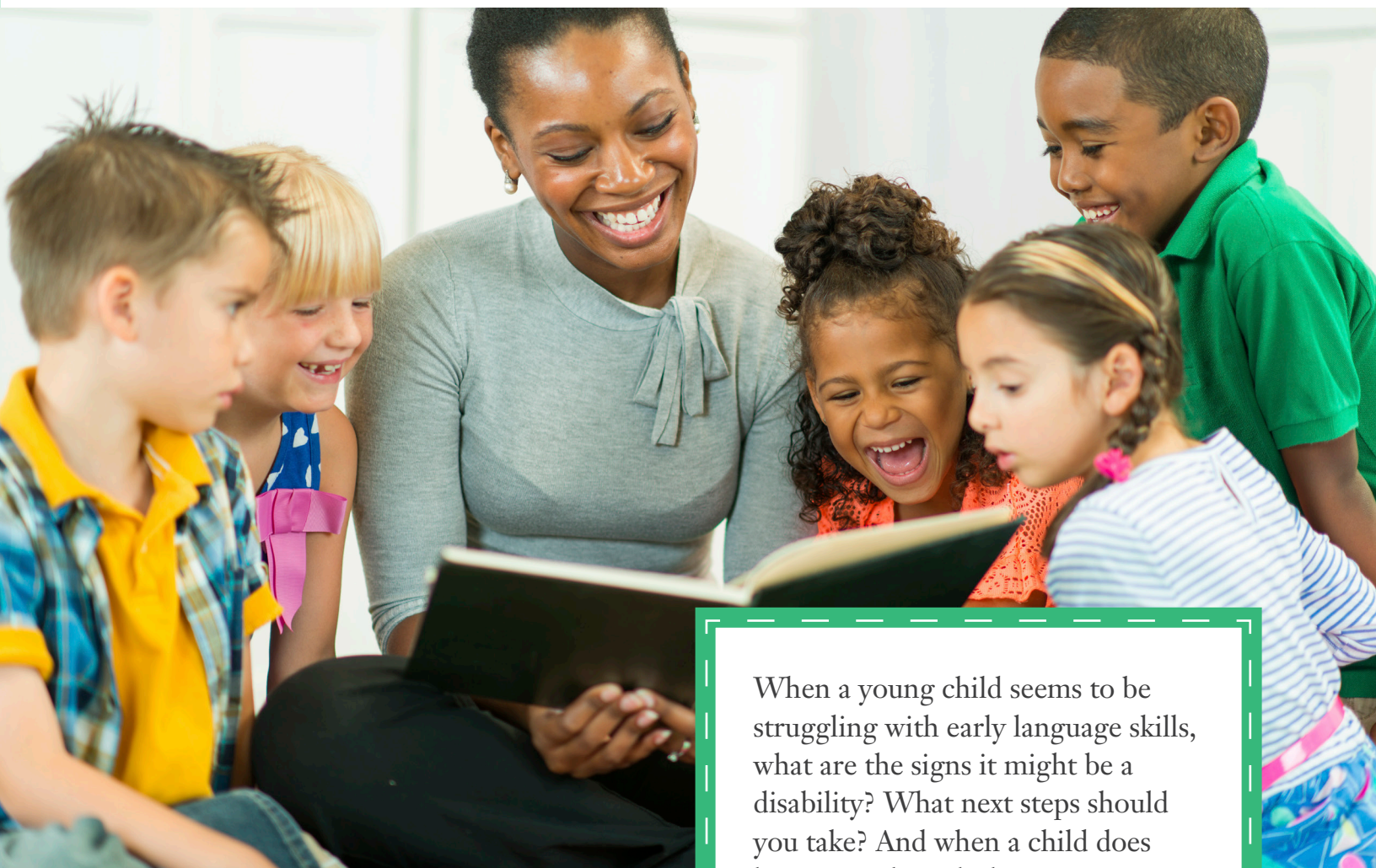
*Don't forget, all activities should be
safely supervised by an adult!*

Adapted from ASQ-3™ Learning Activities
by Elizabeth Twombly, M.S., & Ginger Fink, M.A., Brookes Publishing Co.



special needs
& supports

language and literacy for all



When a young child seems to be struggling with early language skills, what are the signs it might be a disability? What next steps should you take? And when a child does have special needs, how can you best support his or her language and literacy development in early childhood classroom settings?

In this section, you'll learn about

- milestones, red flags, and next steps
- literacy and language supports for children with special needs
- strategies for constructing literacy-rich preschool environments for all learners



Early Language Development

Every child acquires language at his or her own pace, and there's a wide range of development that's considered "normal."

But what key speech milestones should you be on the lookout for in a young child? When a child's language skills seem to be lagging behind, when should you worry, and what next steps should you take? Here are some guidelines from Louis Pellegrino, MD, a developmental pediatrician with more than 20 years of experience.

MILE STONES

Key Early Speech Milestones

Cooing	2-3 months
Babbling	6 months
"Dada" and "mama"	8-9 months
Single words (other than "dada" and "mama")	12 months
Two-word phrases	22-24 months
Partial sentences	28-30 months
Complete (grammatical) sentences	36 months



RED FLAGS

If you notice any of the following red flags, your child should be evaluated further to determine whether a problem with language development exists.

- You have a gut feeling that something is wrong with your child's language development.
- Your child shows little eye contact, responsive smiling, or vocalizations from infancy.
- Your child does not respond when you call him by name.
- Your child is not babbling by 9 months of age.
- Your child has limited vocalizations and is not saying any recognizable words by 15 months of age.
- Your child is not using at least a dozen words consistently by 18 months of age.
- Your child is not using at least 50 single words and some two-word phrases by 2 years of age.
- Your child is not using complete sentences or is still difficult to understand by 3 years of age.
- Your child is extremely frustrated because she cannot easily communicate wants or needs at any age.
- Your child shows little interest in communication at any age.
- Your child has stopped progressing or has had a regression in speech at any age.



NEXT STEPS

- **Talk to your child's primary doctor about your concerns.** Trust yourself and recognize that if you are concerned about your child's speech and language development, your child's doctor should be as well. Your child's doctor can play a critical role in referring you to local resources and in helping to determine whether any medical issues may have a bearing on your child's speech problem.
- **Have your child's hearing tested by a qualified audiologist.** If your child's speech and language skills are delayed, she should have a formal hearing assessment, even if she passed a hearing screening test in the newborn period.
- **Obtain the assistance of a speech-language pathologist.** If your child is younger than 3, the early intervention system is the most important resource for speech therapy and educational support. If your child is older than 3, your local school district will typically provide this support. Parents often consider private speech therapy as well, but insurance coverage is inconsistent, and out-of-pocket expenses can be considerable.

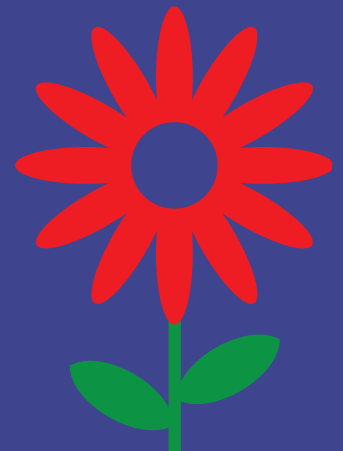
A speech-language pathologist can help in several ways. SLPs will typically work directly with your child and may focus on articulation, comprehension, social communication, or all of these. The SLP will also be a valuable resource for you as you look for ways to help your child at home.

- **Enroll your child in the right educational program.** If your child has speech and language delays, it is advisable to start him in preschool as early as possible, typically at age 3. General education preschools are appropriate for many children with speech delays. These children benefit from exposure to the communication and socialization skills of their typically developing peers. If your child attends a general preschool he will usually receive speech therapy on an itinerant basis—the

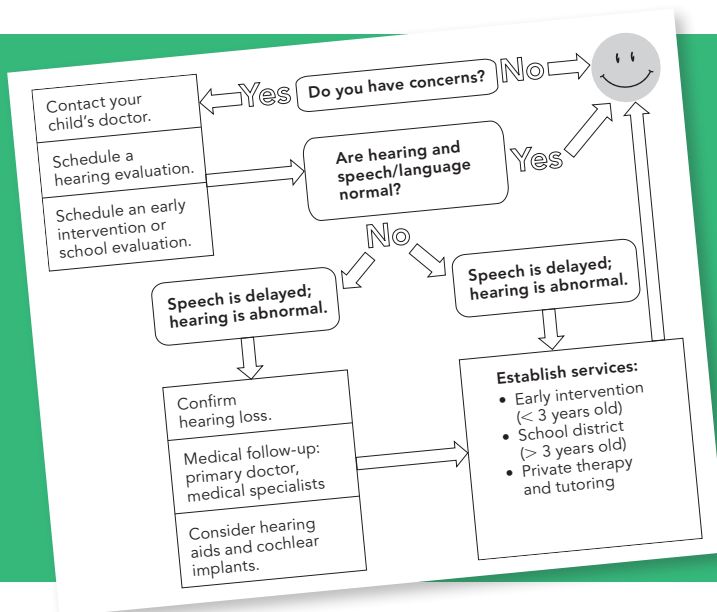
speech-language pathologist will go to the school or, in some cases, come to your home, and work with your child individually. For some children with speech and language delays a specialized preschool program is most appropriate. These are typically obtained through the local school district.

- **Find ways to help at home.** Your child learns most of his or her speech and language skills at home. In the course of the day your child will hear thousands of words in the form of greetings, instructions, commands, questions, descriptions, suggestions, identifications, promptings, and general conversation. There are a number of ways in which you can go beyond this to provide an enhanced language experience for your child at home. Here are some suggestions:

- Engage in child-oriented language and conversation.
- Encourage your child to initiate requests and to be as specific as possible in communicating her wants and needs.
- Schedule one-to-one time with your child away from distractions.
- Create opportunities for interaction with typically developing peers.
- Read to your child every day; make reading a part of the daily routine.
- With the advice of a speech-language pathologist, make judicious use of flashcards, computer programs, and special teaching materials to help your child.
- Limit television viewing.



ACTION PLAN

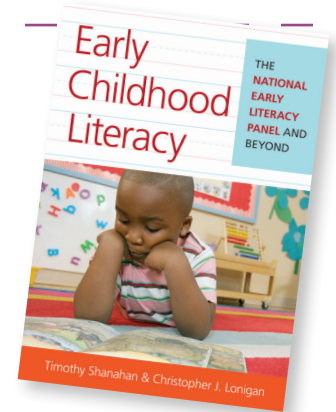


Use this helpful flowchart to decide what steps to take if you have concerns about your child's language development.

Adapted and excerpted from The Common Sense Guide to Your Child's Special Needs, Louis Pellegrino, Brookes Publishing Co.

What Does the Research Say?

Research on this topic is ongoing, but here are some key points from *Early Childhood Literacy*, a guide to current research from more than 20 top experts.



There's no evidence at this point that children with special needs will not benefit from evidence-based practices in early literacy.

Although children with general developmental delays or disabilities or with sensory problems may struggle to learn literacy skills, they should not be ruled out of classwide instruction.

Teachers should monitor the progress of students with disabilities in response to literacy instruction and provide them with a higher level of literacy support if they need it.

Studies show that instructional strategies were effective for children with special needs when implemented in a variety of contexts. Although many interventions were carried out in one-to-one situations in clinic settings by speech and language pathologists, they can also work when implemented in small groups in classrooms by teachers.

Strategies used by parents in home settings, such as shared storybook reading with print referencing, showed some preliminary evidence of effectiveness with children who have special needs.

It's important to increase opportunities for learning through a balance of child- and teacher-initiated activities. Research indicates that when children with special needs are first acquiring literacy skills, they benefit from explicit teaching (i.e., giving clear instructions supplemented with modeling or demonstration, and reinforcing correct responses or giving corrective feedback). Children learn best when you blend this intentional teaching with multiple opportunities for children to practice new skills through games, songs, and other activities throughout the day.



On the next page, you'll see how the teacher of one preschooler with special needs embedded language interventions into routines and activities during the course of a regular school day.

From Early Childhood Literacy, edited by Timothy Shanahan & Christopher J. Lonigan, Brookes Publishing Co.



Teaching Tom

Language Intervention *for* Preschoolers *with* Special Needs

Three-year-old Tom speaks primarily in one-word utterances.

Tom's words are usually intelligible, and he appears to understand much of what is said to him. He's shy when interacting with peers, preferring to watch rather than play with them. He usually pays attention to the teacher during group activities and responds nonverbally to adult directions.

After language assessment, Tom's education team decided to help him work toward these long-term outcomes:

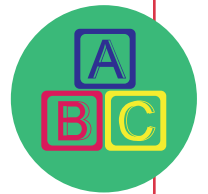
1. Increase vocabulary knowledge
2. Increase mean length of utterances
3. Increase appropriate peer interactions

To help Tom increase vocabulary knowledge, length and complexity of utterances, and appropriate peer interactions, here are some examples of interventions his teacher implemented in the classroom during the day. These included both general language facilitation techniques as well as specific intervention techniques. Paraprofessionals and support professionals can model these techniques, too.

Arrival Time

As Tom plays with the blocks and farm animals, the teacher describes what Tom is doing. Verbal responses from Tom are invited but not required. The teacher uses a number of specific vocabulary words during the activities and invites opportunities for appropriate peer interactions. Tom's teacher:

- Models talk: "You are building a fence. A big fence. The cows can't get out. The cow is jumping. He is jumping over the fence. He's on the ground now."
- Introduces contrasts: "He's not in the truck. He's on the ground."
- Encourages expansion: When Tom says, "Block," the teacher says, "Big block," "Two blocks," "More blocks," or "Blocks in tub," depending on his meaning.
- Prompts peer initiations: "Ask Maya for a block. Say, 'May I have a block, please?'"



Sharing Time

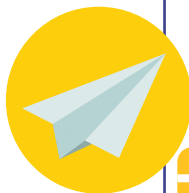
Sharing time teaches children new vocabulary words and helps them learn how to ask and answer questions. As a child shows the class something brought from home, Tom's teacher prompts another child to ask three routine questions about the item ("What do you have?" "What do you do with it?" and "Where did you get it?"). The teacher encourages Tom to participate in asking questions and initiating interactions with his peers.



Dramatic Play/ Center Time

Tom is pretending to be the veterinarian and is playing with a toy doctor kit. His teacher plays along, targeting a number of specific vocabulary words and grammatical morphemes (on, "in," and "-ing"). As they play, Tom's teacher:

- Models talk: "My doggie's sick. Give him a shot," "Is my dog OK?" "Help my dog," and "Thank you for helping my dog."
- Encourages expansions: When Tom says simply, "Hurt," his teacher says, "Doggie is hurt."
- Prompts peer initiations: "Go ask Bobby for a turn. Say, 'May I have a turn, please?'"
- Asks open questions: The teacher asks, "Where can we go?" Tom says, "Vet." His teacher acknowledges and expands his answer: "OK, we'll go to the vet. We're driving to the vet."
- Redirects: When Tom says, "Want car," his teacher gently redirects him to a peer and models politeness: "Ask Charlie, 'Car, please.'"



Outside Time

Outside activities give Tom's teacher many opportunities to model, expand, prompt, and redirect verbal productions. As the children play, she:

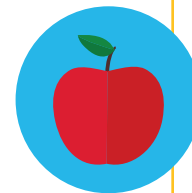
- Teaches a variety of verbs (e.g., run, jump, skip, ride, slide, dig, climb, build) and prepositions (e.g., in, through, on, down, under, on top of, in front of, behind).
- Models talk by varying the complexity of the language she uses: "Mary is sliding down the slide" and "Suzie is riding the bike on the road" versus "Climb ladder" and "Dig in sand."
- Prompts peer initiations: When Tom wants a turn on the bike, his teacher says, "Tell Joe, 'My turn, please,'" to help him negotiate.



Snack Time

Snack time is about more than juice and crackers. It's also an activity packed with language-learning opportunities. As the children enjoy their snack, Tom's teacher:

- Models polite talk: "Please pass the juice," "May I have more crackers, please?"
- Prompts peer initiations. When Tom indicates he wants more juice, his teacher says, "Why don't you ask Suzie to pass the juice." She models "Suzie, please pass the juice" if Tom declines to ask.
- Redirects: When Tom says, "I need more," Tom's teacher redirects with, "Ask Kayla to hand you the crackers." Tom responds with "More, please."
- Lets children sit by their special friends to encourage them to talk to each other.



Art

Tom is decorating a colorful bag for Valentine cards—a great opportunity for more interactions and talk. His teacher:

- Models talk: "The paper is red or pink," "You're cutting out the heart," "You're pasting," and "You're putting it on the bag now."
- Encourages expansions: When Tom says, "Cut," his teacher expands this with, "Cutting the paper."
- Prompts peer initiations: When Tom needs glue, his teacher says, "Ask Tyson. Say, 'More glue, please.'"
- Asks open questions: "What color do you want?" Tom's teacher asks. When he points one out, his teacher models a response: "You want red."



Group Time

During group time, the teacher introduces new vocabulary and concepts to the whole class through lessons that involve matching, labeling, classification, and sequencing. Tom's teacher:



- Targets Tom's vocabulary goals. In Tom's case, his targeted vocabulary includes the location term "in." So Tom's teacher asks him to identify the item that's in the box (versus beside or under the box).
- Models appropriate vocabulary and structure.
- Prompts and expands initiations and responses from Tom and his peers.
- Asks open questions to help all children learn to problem-solve or to focus on a specific feature. For example, the teacher asks, "How can we find out how many ribs Smiley the Skeleton has?" One child responds by saying, "Count them." The teacher has the child help count the ribs.

Music Time

Music time is an opportunity for kids to have fun together as they learn words through songs and rhythm activities. To make the most of music time, Tom's teacher:



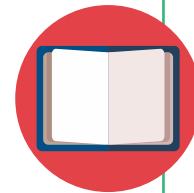
- Picks songs that are short and repetitive so all children can easily learn them.
- Has Tom start out by imitating the different animal sounds as the class learns "Old MacDonald Had a Farm." He'll work his way up to singing the whole song with the class.
- Chooses songs and fingerplays that could help expand Tom's vocabulary knowledge. (Many songs use a variety of action words and labels—for instance, "Going on a Bear Hunt" discusses crossing a bridge, swimming in a river, climbing a cliff, and so on.)

Adapted from Early Literacy in Action by Betty H. Bunce, Brookes Publishing Co.

Storytime

Storytime gives the teacher a chance to expand language skills for the whole class and target Tom's specific goals at the same time. She:

- Selects books that label objects, as a way to present new vocabulary.
- Chooses stories with repetitive lines to teach language structure, help children predict future events, and encourage them to join in.
- Uses dialogue from the story to help Tom produce or practice new sentence structures:
Teacher: Teddy bear, teddy bear, what do you see? I see Tom looking at me. **Tom:** Look me.



Transition Times

Tom's teacher uses transition times as language-learning opportunities for the whole class while targeting Tom's goals. When the children are getting ready to go outside, the teacher:

- Asks questions like "Who is ready?" This encourages children in line with their coats on to respond with "I am" or "He is."
- Provides labels for clothing items or body parts while kids are getting ready: "Put your hand in the mitten," "Let's zip up your coat," "You need your hat to cover your ears."
- Pays special attention to teaching Tom new vocabulary words and grammatical forms (e.g., hand in the mitten).



These simple strategies and techniques illustrate how children with speech and language impairments can receive interventions within a day of typical preschool activities. When teachers provide a language-rich environment with many opportunities for both child-child and adult-child talk, children like Tom can make progress toward their goals—and all learners will benefit, too!

When you design early literacy environments that meet the needs of children with disabilities, all children benefit. Here are some simple ways to ensure literacy-rich preschool classrooms where books and print are accessible to every student.



INCREASE PHYSICAL ACCESS TO BOOKS

Adapted from:

Assistive Technology for Young Children by Kathleen Curry Sadao, Ed.D., and Nancy B. Robinson, Ph.D., CCC-SLP. Brookes Publishing Co.

Making Preschool Inclusion Work by Anne Marie Richardson-Gibbs & M. Diane Klein, Brookes Publishing Co.

For young children with disabilities, some simple physical modifications to your classroom's books can provide more opportunities for developing preliteracy skills. For example:

- Choose durable books with clear pictures and simple text.
- Consider optimal physical positioning—for example, sitting or side-lying on the floor with a bolster or other supports may be most comfortable for the child. Carpet squares in your literacy center can help with stabilizing the child's position.
- If the child needs an angled surface to see the book, use a slantboard with textured fabric. Attach Velcro to the back of the book and place on the slantboard to hold it in place.
- On the book pages, affix "page fluffers" such as dots of puffy paint or Velcro to help children with limited fine motor skills separate each page.
- Attach foam pieces with paper clips to the edges of the pages to make page turning easier.
- Make tablets and e-readers available for children with motor disabilities, and audiobooks available for children with hearing impairments.
- Stock your book corner with reading materials featuring large print, bright and contrasting colors, interesting textures, and braille letters for children with visual impairments. Also, recorded stories with sound effects can help teach appreciation of language and story structure.

BOOST COGNITIVE ACCESS TO BOOKS

Here are some ideas for supporting all young learners' understanding of the books you read them:

- Simplify books by shortening sentences and abbreviating text as you read.
- During shared reading, give students props such as stuffed animals and photographs that correspond to key elements of the story.
- Try covering up excessive text so only key words are visible.
- Use highlighter tape to emphasize important words that relate to pictures or plot elements.
- Introduce graphic symbols that represent text and support understanding of the story.
- Help children connect their own familiar experiences to the characters and plots in books.
- Make simple 3-6 page My Family books using laminated and labeled photographs. These will often catch a child's interest more readily than books with too many words and busy illustrations.
- Choose books with lift-a-flap features or sound buttons to encourage engagement of diverse learners.

PUNCH UP YOUR PLAY CENTERS

Your play centers are the ideal places to give all learners fun new ways to work on key literacy skills. Here are a few good examples of how to enrich favorite activities with language learning:

- **PIZZA PARLOR.** As a prop, include a pizza menu with picture icons and printed words for pizza toppings. Use Velcro-backed icons with pictures/words that children can stick to a Velcro-friendly clipboard when they place orders.
- **BAKING.** In a page protector on a clipboard, give an easy-to-follow recipe with pictures and text labels. Magnetic-backed food icons and ingredient words are fun to stick on cookie sheets or metal bowls.
- **DRESS UP.** Put up dress-up theme pictures clearly labeled with the corresponding words (princess, doctor, pirate, cowboy). If children use a voice output communication aid (VOCA), it can be programmed with steps in a script to "tell the story" of the character and his or her feelings and actions.
- **PET STORE.** Display animal photographs with corresponding text labels that can be attached to the pictures with Velcro. A child's VOCA can be programmed with a script for buying and caring for a pet (e.g., selecting a pet, finding out how much it will cost, feeding the pet).

INCLUDE READING & WRITING DURING DAILY ROUTINES

Everywhere you look, there's another chance to embed literacy opportunities in your classroom. Look for every opportunity to reinforce emerging reading and writing skills throughout the day.

- Teach children to recognize their name labels on personal items, such as their cubbies and jackets.
- Use braille labels on cubbies and chairs for children with visual impairments.
- Print words on a small whiteboard to foreshadow transitions (especially helpful for children with autism).
- During activities, identify the letters on signs and labels you see in the classroom and on your supplies.
- Give children the opportunity to choose a snack or activity by selecting the word card that corresponds to their selection.
- Encourage play throughout the day with chalk, markers, whiteboards, and paper. Use Velcro straps, grips, and other physical accommodations for children who have trouble holding a marker or crayon.

6

Ways to Make Your Book Corner More Inclusive



CHALLENGE #1: Sam is easily distracted—sometimes he stops by the book corner, but he doesn't focus on anything for very long.

TIP: Carefully consider the arrangement and location of your book corner. Do children have to pass through it or near it to get to another popular classroom center? A book corner should be in a low-traffic area and near other quiet centers. Another way to hook the attention of a distractible child is stocking a shelf with some books on his favorite topic.

CHALLENGE #2: Aliyah doesn't seem interested in the books in our book corner.



TIP: For a child who isn't yet interested in or ready for the books on your shelves, include a few photo albums with familiar pictures. You might compile an album of photos from this year's field trips and class activities.

CHALLENGE #4: Our book corner includes an area where kids can write using pencils, paper, and crayons. Ty has fine motor challenges and can't hold a crayon yet, so he doesn't have a chance to participate.

TIP: If you have a writing area in your book corner, make sure you include multiple ways for children with varying motor skills to express themselves. With a felt or magnetic board and letters, Ty might find it easier to participate in writing time.

CHALLENGE #4: Jia is learning to talk. I love that she chooses to read books during free-choice time! How can I enhance her time in the book corner with more chances for her to practice talking?

TIP: Pair Jia with a talkative friend and encourage them to "read" stories to each other (children who can't yet read can make up their own words to go along with the pictures).

CHALLENGE #3: We use books on tape for children who prefer them or find it difficult to engage with physical books. But some kids have trouble using the CD player. How can I help them?

TIP: For children who respond well to visual cues, try using green tape (for start) and red tape (for stop) on the buttons, or label the parts of the machine with stick-on numbers to show the sequence of steps. You might also try peer supports: hook up two pairs of earphones to the player and have children operate it and listen in pairs.

CHALLENGE #5: Elliott gets very loud and excited whenever he listens to books on tape or CD. How can we encourage his enthusiasm while minimizing disruptions for the rest of the kids?

TIP: Try having an adult join him for storytime. The adult can share in and promote his enthusiasm and use a gentle pat on the shoulder or other reminder to help him express excitement in a less disruptive way.



Adapted from Building Blocks for Teaching Preschoolers with Special Needs, Second Edition, by Susan R. Sandall & Ilene S. Schwartz. Appeared in a longer form on the Brookes Inclusion Lab blog, www.brookesinclusionlab.com.

15 Ways to Help Children with Autism Develop Language

Here are 15 tips for encouraging young children with autism to imitate and use words and sounds. (These suggestions are also great for any young child, with or without autism!)

IMITATING SOUNDS AND WORDS

GROOMING AND HYGIENE

Brushing teeth and hair and washing hands and face provide many opportunities for imitation. Model the actions needed while saying important key words, such as “Brush-brush-brush.”

MEALTIME/SNACK TIME

Use sounds and words to describe the food. When preparing and cleaning up, provide opportunities for the child to imitate stirring, rinsing plastic dishes, and wiping off the table. Model the corresponding words.

BOOK TIME

Use gestures to represent actions and concepts in the pictures. Model making sounds and saying words that correspond to the pictures such as “Mmm!” and “Eat” for pictures of food.

COMMUNITY OUTINGS

As you approach the automatic doors at the grocery store, library, or post office, say “open” and model signing open. If the child does not say the word, assist him or her to make the sign.

HOUSEHOLD ACTIVITIES

Tell the child what you will be doing and model corresponding environmental sounds, actions, and words. When getting ready to vacuum, say “Time to vacuum,” make the whirring sound of a vacuum, and pretend to push a vacuum before turning it on.

PLAYTIME

Model actions and their corresponding sounds and words, such as shaking, pushing, flying, filling, dumping, and sweeping.

BATH TIME

When playing with tub toys, model sounds such as “b-b-b-b” for a boat, and words such as “quack-quack” for a duck. Wave and say “hi” and “bye” to toys when putting them in the tub and putting them away.

BEDTIME

Pat the child’s stuffed animals and tell them “Night-night.” Help the child to do the same. Put your fingers to your lips and say “Shhh” or “Night-night” to the child.

USING WORDS

GROOMING AND HYGIENE

When brushing the child’s hair or teeth, sing a song and pause for the child to fill in words, such as “This is the way we brush your ____.” Ask “Now what?” when the child knows what comes next.

MEALTIME/SNACK TIME

Give choices of food and drink for the child to select. Playfully sabotage situations such as giving ice cream but not a spoon to a child who typically uses a spoon. If the child does not request a spoon, ask the child “What do you need?” Give the child small portions so he or she must ask for more.

BOOK TIME

For some pictures, ask the child questions that are appropriate for his or her level of language comprehension. For example, begin with “What’s that?” and “Who’s that?” to target nouns, and when those are mastered, progress to “What is he doing?” to target actions with –ing endings.

COMMUNITY OUTINGS

Set up opportunities for the child to make requests, such as “up” to get in the car, “out” to get out of the shopping cart, and “more” to be pushed again on the swing.

HOUSEHOLD ACTIVITIES

Ask the child if he or she wants to help with household activities such as watering plants or rinsing dishes. When the child is helping, make comments about what he or she is doing and ask relevant questions.

BATH TIME

To facilitate requesting, set up situations so desired bath items are outside the child’s reach. Vary word models to target requesting and commenting (e.g., when the child wants the duck, say, “You want the duck. Say ‘duck,’” and after the child has the duck, say, “You have the duck. Say ‘duck.’”).

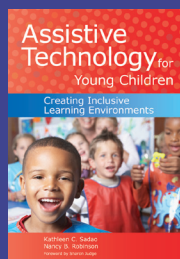
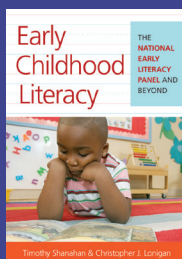
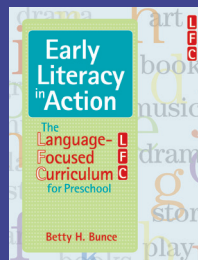
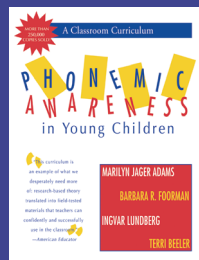
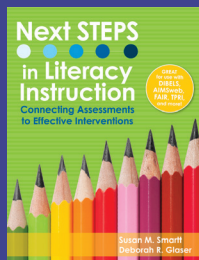
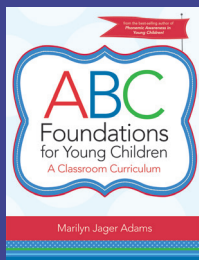
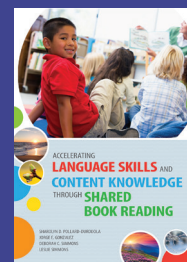
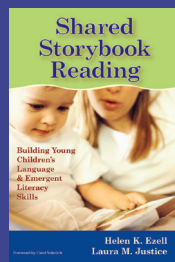
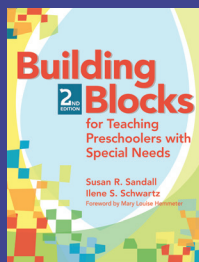
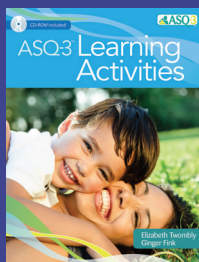
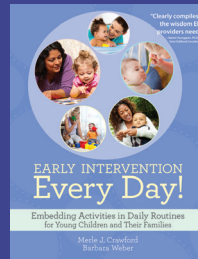
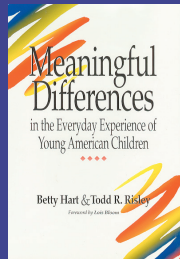
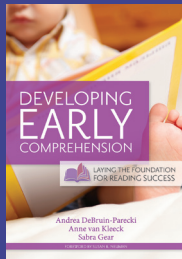
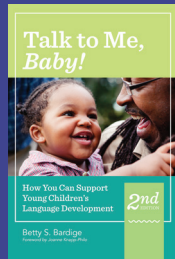
BEDTIME

Encourage the child to use a variety of words: requesting a stuffed animal on the shelf, naming a book to read, and choosing pajamas to wear.



Excerpted and adapted from *Autism Intervention Every Day!* by Merle J. Crawford & Barbara Weber, Brookes Publishing Co.

This guide was created with information from the following Brookes books



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