



How to encourage language development for children birth-5

Language development is about more than talking. It means all the different ways a child understands and communicates, only part of which are spoken words.

Reading is one of the best ways to encourage language development. As an infant, hearing words and seeing pictures helps a child understand the two are connected. This lays a foundation for speech, which begins around 9 months and typically increases as a child grows.



Here are a few ideas to encourage language development at different ages:

- **Birth:** Talk to the child in a calm, soft voice. Sing songs about what you're doing.
- **3 months old:** Talk to and sing to the child. Repetition helps a child begin to understand words and actions. She will begin to babble and coo at this age and you should respond to her sounds.
- **6 months old:** Start reading books, sing songs and say rhymes. You can also describe what's going on around you. If he babbles, make sure to reply.
- **9 months old:** Around this time, an infant will start saying simple words. Continue talking through activities, singing and repeat words to encourage understanding.
- **12 months old:** Speech continues to develop, and reading encourages an expanding vocabulary. Keep naming people, places and things you see regularly to boost understanding.
- **18 months old:** Singing songs and rhymes, and matching actions to the words, is a fun activity at this age. Create a homemade book of favorite things to read daily and monitor understanding.
- **2 years old:** At 2, a toddler typically is able to state short sentences and answer simple yes or no questions. Keep reading, and ask her to point to different objects in each book.
- **3 years old:** Ask the child to retell you favorite stories, and encourage questions. Sing and read.
- **4 years old:** For a preschool-age child, encourage language development by asking him to tell you a story. Write the story down, then have him draw pictures to go with the words.
- **5 years old:** Keep reading a variety of books. Encourage her to tell longer stories by asking "what happened next?" Play rhyming games.

Help Me Grow recommends parents talk to their health care provider or refer a child through Help Me Grow if they notice any loss of speech or babbling at any age. For more information on how to encourage and support a child's language development, or refer a child, visit helpmegrowmn.org.