

HELPING CHILDREN LEARN LANGUAGE

Children learn language when they have lots of opportunities to hear people talk and to speak with people who are important to them. This includes parents, brothers and sisters, other family members, friends and caregivers. Researchers tell us that children learn a second language more easily when they know their first language well. The following suggestions are ways to help children learn their first language as well as other languages.

How you can help children learn language

Listen

Listening to children is very important. They need to practice talking. When you listen, they will learn that what they say is interesting to others.

Use simple words

Young children learn the names of objects and action words first. Talk with them about things in your home and in your neighbourhood.

Teach a little at a time

Learning a language happens slowly. Expect to repeat new words many times. Children may need to hear a word 50 times before they can use it.

Spend more time with children who speak very little

Children sometimes talk more if you have some quiet time together, even if it's just a few minutes.

Provide a need to talk

If children get what they need by just pointing, they won't need to talk. Encourage children to say in words what they want.

Talk about what you are doing

Describe daily activities to children. For example, "I am stirring the soup so it won't burn." Or "You are throwing the ball." Children learn new words and understand their meanings in this way.

Add to what children say

Show children that you understand what they mean. For example, the child might say "Daddy go." You could reply, "Yes, Daddy is going to the store." This gives the child more information and new words. If an older child says "I goed to the store", you could say, "Yes, you went to the store."

Sing songs

Singing is another way of using language, telling stories and learning about the world.

Ask children questions

Help children learn how to talk with others. Ask questions about their feelings and ideas. For example, “What do you think will happen next?” or “Why do you think that?” or “How do you feel about that?”

Read stories to children

Read to children often. Listening to stories helps children learn language and prepares them for learning to read.

Tell stories

Tell children stories you liked when you were young. Story telling is one way children learn about their cultural heritage. Encourage children to tell stories too.

Limit television

Watching television is one way children can learn language. Children also need to practice language by talking with others.