



Teaching Toddlers to Communicate Resource Supplement

- Each year, one in four children under the age of five are identified by their family doctors as being “at risk” for developmental delays.
- Research has shown that parent-child interactions are an impactful way to help early learners to connect with others and communicate.
- In this resource, we offer some tips on how you can increase your child’s language and communication skills at home, in fun, motivating ways, during your daily routine.

For Additional Information:

Watch the webinar



Visit our website



What's Included:

- How to arrange your environment to increase communication
- Learning during mealtimes
- Learning through play
- Learning at bedtime

Additional Resources:

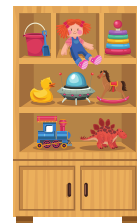
- [CDC Milestone Tracker app](#)
- [Educational App Store](#), review of communication apps
- [Talking with Your Toddler: 75 Fun Activities and Games by Teresa and Laura Laikko](#)

Arranging the Environment to Increase Communication

By making a few adjustments in how a home environment is set up and how playtime activities are structured, parents can help an early learner make meaningful advances in their socio-communication development.

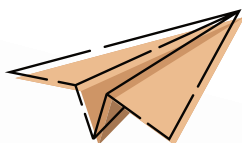
If your child has immediate access to all of their favorite toys, they won't have a need to communicate with you when they are wanting to play with a specific toy. While it's certainly a good idea to have some toys out at all times for your child to seek out independently, it's also helpful to have some in sight, but out of reach.

- You might place a few favorite toys on a shelf that your child can see, but not reach. This will provide you with an opportunity to teach your child how to request one of the toys on the shelf.



- Keep preferred toys in bins or containers that your child can't open by themselves, so they have to request your help.

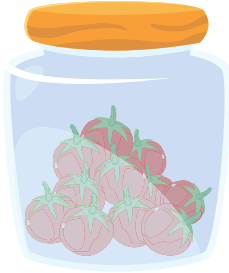
- Set up an activity that your child enjoys, like a ramp for vehicles to race down. However, hold back the items necessary to engage in the activity or put them in a clear container - in this case, vehicles, and present two choices at a time. Have your child request vehicles one by one, thus increasing practice opportunities.



- Include in your environment toys or activities that your child is interested in, but that require your participation. For example, building a paper airplane, blowing bubbles or making a toy fly.

Creating Mealtime Learning Opportunities

Mealtimes offer wonderful opportunities to work on teaching language, as there is inherent structure and motivation already built into the activity. If it feels too overwhelming to turn every meal into an instructional activity, start with just one meal a day.



- Offer small portions of the meal with pauses in between offerings to elicit communication. Using clear containers can be helpful for this, so that your child can see the food but will need to communicate for more. For example giving a couple slices of apple instead of the whole thing at once.

- You can model the word you are teaching while giving them more, for example saying “berry” or “strawberry” as you put a couple in their bowl. After modeling this a few times, purposefully pause while holding out the berries to give your child an opportunity to make a request.



- Many foods come in different colors, so this can be a great place to start working on expanding requests. If your child requests an apple, hold a green apple in one hand and a red apple in the other. While showing them each apple, ask “do you want a green apple (put out hand with green apple) or red apple (put out hand with red apple)?”

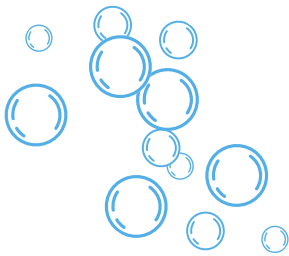
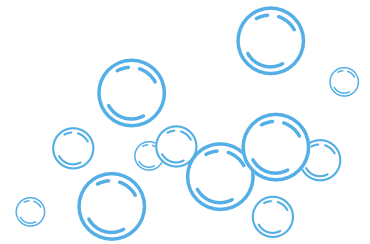
- Another way to expand your child’s language during mealtimes is by thinking about what other things your child may need in order to eat their meal and intentionally leaving some of them out. For example, giving them yogurt but no spoon or cereal but no milk. Similarly you can give your child foods in closed containers or packages that they can’t open. You can also give them un-peeled or uncut items to encourage them to request for “open”, “cut”, or “help”.



Creating Learning Opportunities During Play

Letting your child initiate and direct play helps them to connect with you and other family members. Think about games, songs, and toys you loved as a child and see if you can introduce a few of them with your own little one as a way to build their skills. When you approach play as an enjoyable way to help your child learn and use new words and actions, you'll likely find yourself as engaged and excited about playing as your child is!

- Watch your child as they approach a shelf or other area that has several toys. Which toy or other object do they reach for? Let that toy or other object be the focus of your play for the next 5, 10, or 15 minutes, until your child is showing signs that they are bored or signs that they are more interested in a different activity.



- As your child gravitates towards a toy, name it. For example, if your child approaches a container of bubbles, you might say, "Oh, you want bubbles!" Blow a few bubbles and allow your child to pop or chase them. When the bubbles have popped, pause and wait for your child to initiate wanting more.

- Hold onto the container of the bubbles, so that your child is motivated to connect with you in order for you to make more bubbles appear. For as long as your child remains motivated, you can use the bubbles to extend your child's language and imitation skills.



- Not all play requires toys or objects. Think about games that you played as a young child - Ring Around the Rosy, Peek-A-Boo and tag are a few examples of interactive games that require no objects. These activities, which require multiple people and build excitement off of anticipating the next step, offer wonderful opportunities for building a child's shared attention, language, and imitation skills.



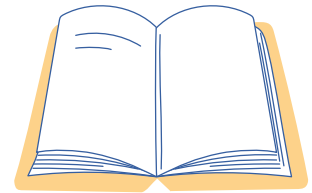
Creating Learning Opportunities at Bedtime

Bedtime provides a great opportunity to connect with your child and practice language skills. However, you can also incorporate other essential skills into your routines, including imitation, fine motor, and building independence with self-care routines.



- Bathtime toys have come incredibly far with bathtub crayons and finger paint now available; both of which you can use to work on fine motor skills in a new setting. You can have your child practice how to write their name or draw shapes using the bathtub crayons.

- Reading a story or children's book with your child can provide numerous opportunities to explore language. Using any book, you can work on having the child read the story with you, identify people or items that are located within the pictures, answer questions about what is happening in the story, what their favorite character is doing or even what they think may happen next.



- When putting on pajamas you can work on increasing your child's independence with each step by gradually decreasing the amount of help you are providing. Have them do more steps on their own as they make progress until they can do all of them by themselves. You can also use this time to work on labeling body parts or parts of clothing.

- Try singing familiar songs and using the familiarity to work on verbal and imitation skills. Right before you come to the end of each phrase, purposefully pause and allow your child to 'fill-in-the-blank'. With the same song, you can model the hand motions for each relevant part (i.e. rolling your hands and forearms around to imitate the wheels of the bus "go(ing) round and round").

