

KEYS TO GREAT PARENTING



Fun and
Learning
with Your
Baby or Toddler

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Communicating with Infants and Toddlers

Did you know that babies begin to learn about language even before birth? Many mothers sing and read poems aloud during the last three or four months of pregnancy because they know that a baby can hear the mother's voice during that time.

Once babies are born, parents need to talk and listen to them long before their little ones can speak in words. Babies voice their needs and wants and practice language with cries, coos, and babbles.

Keep your baby close to you, and softly talk to her. Tell her about yourself and the rest of her family. You can explain to her about a book you are reading or what you are going to shop for at the store.

Repeat back the cooing and babbling sounds she makes. Imitating her sounds is fun and sometimes hard! By engaging in this practice, you show her that you respect her and that you like her courageous experiments with language.

Do remember that even newborns sense adults' feelings and may become anxious. For this reason, avoid sharing your worries and troubles with your baby or toddler. Save them for an understanding adult.

Your little one is a master of communication. If you pay really close attention to her, you will probably be surprised at the wealth of fascinating information she communicates. Pay attention to her sounds and movements, and to her moods and facial expressions. Tune into her feelings and needs, such as frustration, anger, discomfort, and hunger. Notice when and how she wants affection, and take pleasure in her delights, discoveries, and joys.

Tell your child in short, clear sentences what you think he is saying. Ask him if you are right, and watch for his response. For example, say to him, "What are you telling me? Is your diaper wet?" Toddlers may nod, point, or try to say a word. You can then reply in the same clear style with words such as, "OK, let's change that diaper so that you'll be all fresh and dry."

Listen to your toddler patiently and use his words in sentences again and again. Eventually, he will begin to use the words correctly. Remember to stay relaxed and good humored. Your toddler

has a great urge to learn to talk and to be understood. Allow his language to unfold according to his own developmental pace. Before long he'll be pronouncing his words like a pro!

When addressing your toddler, speak just a little slower than you normally do, and say words clearly, using short sentences. Make sure you have your toddler's attention as you talk to her. When she focuses on your eyes, she is more likely to listen carefully.

Another great way to develop your child's communication skills is to cuddle up and read with her as often as you can. Select books that are in tune with your little one's age and interests. Talk with her about the pictures and words in the book, even if she does not talk enough to answer you. One day you will notice that she joins the conversation.

Many experts in child development say that reading is the single most important learning activity you can do with your child. Besides promoting good communication skills, reading prepares children to become good students during the many years of schooling that the future will bring. Avoid workbook drills with young children. Story reading is better and much more fun.

Your child is a miracle! By cuddling, talking, listening, and reading, you help your child's brain grow stronger while teaching important communication skills. Never underestimate your influence. You are your child's first and most important teacher, and your love makes all the difference in the world.