

How Can I Help?

Birth-12 months

- Check your child's ability to hear, and pay attention to ear problems and infections, especially when they keep occurring.
- Reinforce your baby's communication attempts by looking at him or her, speaking, and imitating his or her vocalizations.
- Repeat his or her laughter and facial expressions.
- Teach your baby to imitate actions, such as peekaboo, clapping, blowing kisses, pat-a-cake, it'sy bitsy spider, and waving bye-bye. These games teach turn taking that is needed for conversation.
- Talk while you are doing things, such as dressing, bathing, and feeding (e.g., "Mommy is washing Sam's hair"; "Sam is eating carrots"; "Oh, these carrots are good!").
- Talk about where you are going, what you will do once you get there, and who and what you'll see (e.g., "Sam is going to Grandma's house. Grandma has a dog. Sam will pet the dog.>").
- Teach animal sounds (e.g., "A cow says 'moo'").
- Communicate with your child in the language you are most comfortable using.

1-2 years

- Talk while doing things and going places. When taking a walk in the stroller, for example, point to familiar objects (e.g., cars, trees, and birds) and say their names. "I see a dog. The dog says 'woof.' This is a big dog. This dog is brown."
- Use simple but grammatical speech that is easy for your child to imitate.
- Take a sound walk around your house or in the baby's room. Introduce him/her to Timmy Clock, who says "t-t-t-t." Listen to the clock as it ticks. Find Mad Kitty Cat who bites her lip and says "f-f-f-f" or Vinnie Airplane who bites his lip, turns his voice motor on and says "v-v-v-v." These sounds will be old friends when your child is introduced to phonics in preschool and kindergarten.
- Make bath time "sound playtime" as well. You are eye-level with your child. Play with Peter Tugboat, who says "p-p-p-p." Let your child feel the air of sounds as you make them. Blow bubbles and make the sound "b-b-b-b." Feel the motor in your throat on this sound. Engines on toys can make a wonderful "rrr-rrr-rrr" sound.
- Expand on words. For example, if your child says "car," you respond by saying, "You're right! That is a big red car."
- Continue to find time to read to your child every day. Try to find books with large pictures and one or two words or a simple phrase or sentence on each page. When reading to your child, take time to name and describe the pictures on each page.
- Have your child point to pictures that you name.
- Ask your child to name pictures. He or she may not respond to your naming requests at first. Just name the pictures for him or her. One day, he or she will surprise you by coming out with the picture's name.

2-3 years

- Cut out pictures from old catalogs. Then make silly pictures by gluing parts of different pictures together in an improbable way. For example, glue a picture of a dog to the inside of a car as if the dog is driving. Help your child explain what is silly about the picture.
- Sort pictures and items into categories, but increase the challenge by asking your child to point out the item that does not belong in a category. For example, a baby does not belong with a dog,

cat and mouse. Tell your child that you agree with his or her answer because a baby is not an animal.

- Expand vocabulary and the length of your child's utterances by reading, singing, talking about what you are doing and where you are going, and saying rhymes.
- Read books that have a simple plot, and talk about the story line with your child. Help your child to retell the story or act it out with props and dress-up clothes. Tell him or her your favorite part of the story and ask for his or her favorite part.
- Look at family pictures, and have your child explain what is happening in each one.
- Work on comprehension skills by asking your child questions. Have him or her try to fool you with his or her own questions. Make this game playful by pretending that you have been fooled by some of his or her really hard questions.
- Expand on social communication and storytelling skills by "acting out" typical scenarios (e.g., cooking food, going to sleep, or going to the doctor) with a dollhouse and its props. Do the same type of role-playing activity when playing dress-up. As always, ask your child to repeat what he or she has said if you do not understand it completely. This shows that what he or she says is important to you.

3-4 years

- Cut out pictures from old catalogs. Then make silly pictures by gluing parts of different pictures together in an improbable way. For example, glue a picture of a dog to the inside of a car as if the dog is driving. Help your child explain what is silly about the picture.
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4-5 years

- Talk about spatial relationships (first, middle, and last; right and left) and opposites (up and down, big and little).
- Offer a description or clues and have your child identify what you are describing.
- Work on forming and explaining categories (fruits, furniture, shapes).
- Follow your child's directions as she or he explains how to do something.
- Give full attention to your child when he or she is speaking, and acknowledge, praise, and encourage him or her afterward. Before you speak to your child, be sure to get his or her undivided attention. Pause after speaking, allowing him or her to respond to what you have said.

- Build on your child's vocabulary. Provide definitions for new words, and use them in context: "This *vehicle* is riding on the highway. It is a car. A bus is another kind of vehicle. So are a train and an airplane."
- Encourage your child to ask for an explanation if he or she does not understand what a word means.
- Point out things that are the same or different. Play games incorporating these concepts that he or she will encounter later in the classroom in reading readiness.
- Sort items into categories. Now try to sort them by pointing out more subtle differences between objects (e.g., rocks that are smooth vs. those that are rough, heavy vs. light, big vs. small). Again, have your child identify the object that does not belong in a given category, but now ask him or her to explain why the item does not belong.
- Expand on social communication and narration skills (telling a story) by role-playing. Play house, doctor, and store using dialogue, props, and dress-up clothes. Do the same with a dollhouse and its props, acting out scenarios and making the dolls talk.
- Read stories with easy-to-follow plots. Help your child predict what will happen next in the story. Act out the stories, and put on puppet shows of the stories. Have your child draw a picture of a scene from the story, or of a favorite part. You can do the same thing with videos and television shows, as these also have plots. Ask "wh" questions (who, what, when, where, or why) and monitor his or her response.
- Expand on your child's comprehension and expressive language skills by playing "I Spy": "I spy something round on the wall that you use to tell the time." After your child guesses what you have described, have him or her give you clues about something that he or she sees.
- Give your child two-step directions (e.g., "Get your coat from the closet and put it on"). Encourage your child to give directions to explain how he or she has done something. For example, ask your child to explain how he made a structure out of Lego blocks. When playing doctor, ask your child to explain what she did to give the baby a checkup. Draw a picture, and write down your child's story as he or she tells it. Your child will soon grasp the power of storytelling and written language.
- Play age-appropriate board games with your child (e.g., "Candyland" or "Chutes and Ladders").
- Have your child help you plan and discuss daily activities. For example, have him or her make a shopping list for the grocery store, or help you plan his or her birthday party. Ask his or her opinion: "What do you think your cousin would like for his birthday? What kind of fruit do we need to buy at the store?"