

Activities to Encourage Language and Imitation

There are many specific activities that can help infants develop an understanding of language and encourage communication. We also work on activities that foster imitative skill development so that children will learn through watching others.

Language learning is not confined to just special times or special activities. Language is a part of our daily experience. We provide opportunities for the infant to hear language as part of all daily routines, diapering, rocking, feeding, as well as playing. Whenever we are with an infant we try to talk, to describe what is happening, what we are doing, and what she is doing. Our speech is slowed and simplified and we vary our pitch and level.

Birth to Three Months

- Talking with baby: Talk softly to the baby as you hold or feed him.

Three to Six Months

- Face to face interaction: Hold baby directly in front of you. Talk to him and encourage him to coo back. Talk-pause-talk-pause. Try making the same cooing sounds as the baby.
- Picture show: Let the infant explore and touch large pictures. Label objects.

Six to Nine Months

- Let's babble: Make some of the sounds you know the baby can make and see if he will imitate you.
- Imitating banging: Begin banging with your hands on a hard surface and see if the infant will bang with you. When he does, say "bang, bang, bang". Once the infant has mastered this activity see if he will imitate you when you bang with a spoon.
- Clapping: Clap your hands and encourage the infant to clap his. Once he can imitate clapping see if he will clap when he's given the verbal command.
- Waving: Substitute waving for clapping in the above activity.
- Body parts: Use a large doll with clear features. Show baby how to point to the eyes, ears, nose, mouth. Next, teach him to point to his own body.
- Blowing: Blow on baby's tummy. Show him how to blow.
- Smelling: Show the infant how to smell a flower.

Nine to Twelve Months

- Object grab: Place two objects in front of the baby. Say "Show me the shoe", "Show me the plate". Later add more objects.
- Look at a picture book: Ask the infant to point to specific pictures.
- Songs, Chants, and Nursery Rhymes: Songs, nursery rhymes, and chants give infants the opportunity to hear language. Repetition at this age is important and special songs help the infant become more aware of the rhythms, patterns and inflections associated with speech.

Music for Babies

Babies enjoy all different kinds of music. Music can set moods. Play soothing lullabies during sleeping or feeding times. Put on a disco beat and let the babies dance. Play children's songs and encourage all the infants to shake a rattle or musical instrument to the music. Put on a marching beat and bang the drums (a drum made out of an oatmeal box or coffee can works as well) or march in a circle.

Twelve to Twenty-four Months

- Picture games: Play games involving pointing to and labeling specific pictures and objects.
- Doll games: Give the infant the doll and the appropriate prop. Ask him to hug the doll, kiss the doll, put the doll to sleep, wipe the doll's nose, rock the doll, feed her and put her in her crib. Show her how to brush the doll's hair and give her a bath.
- Picture albums: Make picture albums with pictures of familiar toys, objects, boats, people.
- Retrieval games: Send the infant on "errands." Say, "Get the doll," "Bring me the ball, " etc.
- Puppets: Introduce puppets. Show children how to make them talk.
- Picture matching games: Between 20-24 months many children begin to match pictures.
- Books: "Read" to the child. Help him point out and label familiar items.
- Tea party: Encourage pretend activities that involve setting the table, cooking and washing dishes. Show the child how to pretend to pour coffee, to stir a cake, etc.
- Drum games: Show the child how to play rhythms on a drum. A decorated oatmeal carton or coffee can will work very well.
- Mirror games: Look in the mirror with the child and help her identify body parts.
- Hat and bead games: Give the child a hat or beads to put on and take off.
- Driving games: Props can be keys, steering wheels, or riding toys. Talk about where the child is going, what he will do when he gets there, etc.
- Telephone games: Encourage two way conversation by talking with the child as he plays with the toy.
- Nursery rhymes, songs and chants: Give toddlers many opportunities to participate in music experiences.