

Twenty Ways to Encourage Children's Language Development

1. Speak as you normally do. No need to oversimplify your language or use baby talk.
2. Put words to the child's actions: "Max is rolling the ball."
3. Tell the child what you are doing: "I am washing Max's hands."
4. Use nouns instead of pronouns: "Let's find the ball (not *it*)," "Let's play with Nia (not *her*)."
5. Respond to crying and cooing: "Max, you must be hungry. Is that why Max is crying?" "Max is talking to me."
6. Use descriptive language with lots of adjectives and adverbs: "Max, you are rolling the small ball quickly."
7. Listen and respond to a child's words and sounds, allowing the give-and-take of conversation to occur.
8. Model language by using words instead of gestures: "Nia, please come sit in the blue chair."
9. Expand a child's single-word utterances: "*Ba.*" "Nia, you're right—*ball*. That is a big, green ball."
10. Label and enhance a child's language: "*More water.*" "Max, I will put more cool water in your cup."
11. Name the child's possible feelings: "Nia, you get angry when your friend eats your food."
12. Allow for silent pauses. Talk, but avoid bombarding the child with language.
13. Ask the child questions before verbal answers are possible. "Is that a bird sitting in that tree, Max?"
14. Affirm a child's use of language by repeating it: "Yes, Max, that is a ball."
15. Encourage children to name objects by pointing at or retrieving them. "Nia, will you hand me the book?" "Would Nia like to point to the picture of the train?"
16. Let the child feel language. Place the child's hand on your throat while you talk or let the child feel the air coming from your mouth when you speak.
17. Construct and pose questions that require a child to answer with more than "Yes" or "No." "Nia, would you like a cup of water or a cup of juice?"
18. Reinforce appropriate language skills: "Max wants juice. Thanks for telling me what you want to drink."
19. Sing songs and make up silly songs.
20. Read to the child. Even a young infant can benefit from being nurtured and read to.