

Language Development: From Listening to Speaking



The sounds that infants make before real words are sometimes called “vocal play.” They are practicing real elements of language. Babies learn how to move their mouths and tongues during vocal play. They learn to produce the same sounds they have been listening to!



The Take-Home

There are different stages of learning to talk. First, children produce language sounds, then syllables, then words, and finally sentences. Interactions between caregivers and children are an important part of this process.

Want to
Learn
More?



Science Says

- Language learning begins at birth! Those children who hear more language and experience more high quality interactions tend to produce more words and longer sentences.
- Babies begin making vowel-like sounds soon after birth. They soon add consonant sounds. Then they transition to syllables, words, and finally sentences. This pattern is similar across different cultures and languages.
- Children use different strategies to learn words and word combinations. During the process of learning, they sometimes make errors in word or sentence use. As they hear more language, their use of words and sentences becomes more adult-like.



Try it at Home

- Narrate your daily activities! If you're at the grocery store with your child, talk to them about the different fruits and vegetables. “Look at the green apples! Do you see the apples? What else do you see that is green?”
- Ask your infant open-ended questions! Continue this dialogue as your child grows. Ask questions, describe events, and make comparisons. This helps children develop language and critical thinking skills.
- Read with your child. Make story time into a conversation. This teaches children new words and how to ask questions. It's also fun time with you!