

## Positive Parenting of Toddlers

# Language

*Language is an important area in toddler development. Their understanding and use of language grows rapidly and is closely related to their general understanding of the world. Parents can play an important role in the language development of their children. This tip sheet gives some suggestions to help you encourage your toddler's language development.*

### How Much Do Toddlers Understand?

Children develop from understanding about ten words at 12 months to more than 800 words by three years of age, when they begin to understand more complex sentences.

### When Do Children Start To Speak?

Children differ greatly in when and how quickly they learn to speak. Do not be concerned if your child is a little faster or slower than others. If you are worried that your child's language development seems to be much slower than children of the same age, seek professional help. See the table (over the page) for an idea about what to expect as your child develops language.

### How To Promote Language Development

#### **Listen to Your Child**

Where possible, be available when your child tries to communicate through language. Be prepared to wait patiently for your child to speak rather than guessing at what they want. Look at your child and listen to what they say.

#### **Talk to Your Child**

Your child's interest in speaking will increase when you speak to them often. Throughout the day talk about and name things your child looks at. Get close to your child and bend down to their eye level when you speak to them.

#### **Encourage Correct Pronunciation**

Try repeating a word that your child has pronounced incorrectly, then prompt them to try it again. For example, if your child points to a butterfly and says *but-fly*, say something like—*Yes Rachel, that's a butterfly. Say butt-er-fly.* If your child makes any attempt at the word, praise them. If not, do not worry, there will be plenty of other opportunities.

#### **Expand on Your Child's Speech**

Ask your child questions and encourage them to say more. For example, if your child shows you one of their toys, instead of simply saying—*That's a truck*—invite your child to tell you more about it—*That's a great truck. What sort of truck is it?* If your child does not answer, prompt a



response—*It looks like a tow truck. What does a tow truck do?* If your child tries to answer your questions, praise them and repeat what they have said—*That's right, they tow cars.* If your child still does not answer, point out and talk about some things that you can see, such as wheels, doors, hooks and chains. Toddlers benefit a great deal from these kinds of conversations, particularly when they are brief and occur often.

#### **Provide a Good Language Model**

Try to avoid using baby talk or talking down to your toddler. It will help your child's language development if you use real words for things and speak in proper sentences. Toddlers are easily confused if you speak in long sentences and use many words they do not understand. On the other hand, do not be afraid to introduce new words when you are speaking to your child. This will increase your child's vocabulary.

#### **Describe What You Are Doing**

Children often enjoy watching their parents working around the house. They enjoy it even more if they can help or talk with you while they watch. Take the time to describe what you are doing. Descriptions of simple everyday events like weeding the garden, cooking, sewing, building something or taking care of a baby may stimulate your child's interest and prompt them to ask questions.

#### **Share Your Feelings and Ideas**

Another part of describing what you are doing involves sharing your feelings and experiences with your child. Here are some examples:

- Tell your child about your day.
- Explain something that made you laugh.
- Describe what you saw on the way home from work.
- Talk about the people you spoke to.

## Encourage Questions

Parents can give their toddlers lots of information about the world. Children develop their language skills by asking many questions. Be patient and encourage your child to ask questions by answering in words they understand.

## Comment on Your Child's Play

Parents can participate in their child's play without taking over or directing it. Watch what your child is doing and make a comment that extends their interest in the activity. One way to do this is to ask a question about their game or activity—*Where does dolly sleep?* or *Bill, who puts out fires?*

## Read to Your Child

Toddlers love to have stories read to them and to look through picture books with an interested adult, particularly at bedtime. Read to your child from an early age. Obtain a good supply of books and read to your child regularly (at least once a day if you can). However, do not force your child to listen to a story if they are not interested.

## Points To Remember

Toddlers can learn two languages at the same time without any problems. By the age of three they will usually speak both languages well and know which language goes with which person.

Two and three year olds commonly stutter and stammer in getting their words out. Usually these problems improve with time. Do not be tempted to interrupt and finish your child's sentences. Encourage your child by waiting patiently.

### Key Steps

- Be available to listen to your child.
- Talk to your child and name things.
- Encourage attempts at speech.
- Provide a good language model.
- Share your thoughts, feelings and knowledge with your child.
- Encourage your child to ask questions.
- Comment on your child's play.
- Read to your child.

**See the booklet 'Positive Parenting' for more information. If you have any questions or are concerned about your child's language development, contact the centre where you were given this tip sheet.**

## Milestones In Language Development

Age	Abilities
12 months	Stream of babble with the rhythm of speech. Can usually say a few words— <i>mum mum, dada, no</i> . Connects names with the right person. Uses pointing and gesturing to communicate. Understands five to 10 words. Responds to one step instructions— <i>Give it to me</i> or <i>Come to Daddy</i> .
15 months	Babble contains more recognisable words. Words used are usually naming words and occasionally words for giving and taking— <i>more, ta</i> . Uses clear gestures. Understands more than 24 words.
18 months	Uses six to 12 words (children vary greatly). Names certain objects and special people, says <i>yes, no, bye bye</i> . Repeats last words of parents' sentences. Uses pointing and sounds to express desires. Understands up to 100 words.
24 months	Starts to combine words— <i>Daddy home, pretty dress, my ball, go to sleep</i> . Uses appropriate gestures if not yet speaking or cannot quite say what they want. Understands up to 300 words. Responds to complex instructions.

Written by the Parenting and Family Support Centre (Triple P), The University of Queensland, Brisbane.

Published by the Victorian Parenting Centre 2005.

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Code: PPT2010

