



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime



Talking, Reading, and Singing:

A Guide for the Toddler Years

Toddlers are learning language fast!

Things you can do to boost their skills:

- ▶ **Chat.** Talk with your child throughout the day. Make sure it's a conversation — pause and give your child a chance to respond. Even young babies may respond with a gaze, a sound, babbling, or words! The more words they hear, the more they learn.
- ▶ **Notice.** Pay attention to what your child likes. Put their actions into words. "Yes, that is a squirrel. Looks like he's in a hurry."
- ▶ **Use lots of different words.** A snack can be "yummy" or "crunchy." It can be "round" or "sweet."
- ▶ **Describe what's happening as you go about your day.** Talk about what you do. Talk about what your child does.
- ▶ **Be a translator.** Some adults may not understand your child. You can help by repeating what they say. "Ben says this is his new truck." This helps others understand them.
- ▶ **Don't correct mistakes.** At this age, just say the word the right way. If they say "Gamma," you say, "Grandma gave you a cookie!" They will learn over time.

Tips for reading:

Follow their lead. Let your child pick the book even if they pick the same one over and over! Young children like repetition because it gives them time to learn the story.

You don't have to read every word.

Looking at the pictures and talking about them is fine, too. Also, give your toddler a chance to tell *you* the story. This helps children love books.

Let them move. Keep reading if they move around. Some kids listen best while they move. They may come back to the book.

Act it out. Ask your child to demonstrate an action from the story. Hop like a frog. Roar like a bear.

"Read" the world around you. Point to signs like "stop." Show "open" and "closed." Let them look at menus and mail. Seeing words in print helps them learn.

Tell a story. You don't need a book. Tell a story you know or make one up. This helps your child learn that stories have a start, middle, and end. This also builds strong listening skills.



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12–18 months: first words and deeper communication

Milestones:

Many children say one or two words, but they may understand many more. They use signs and gestures, too. By 14 months, they will point to show you something or ask a question.

Tips:

- Name simple things like “cup” and “milk.”
- Give your child time to answer. If they say “ball,” add more words. “That is your big red ball.”
- Play listening games like “Show me your nose.”
- Share rhymes and songs. Bounce your baby on your lap or clap hands along with the song.

18 months–2 years: growing language

Milestones:

Toddlers start to follow simple directions. They put two words together. They may say, “car go” or “want juice.” They begin pretend play. Pretend play helps language grow as children act out stories.

Tips:

- Ask toddlers to help with small tasks. “Put your cup on the table.”
- Play pretend with dolls, cars, pots and pans.
- Read longer stories. Ask questions as you read the story. This builds language skills.
- Choose books with words that repeat throughout the story. Young toddlers can join in with this part of the book!.
- Let them turn the pages of books. Independent toddlers like to have a “job” to do!

2–3 years: sentences and storytelling

Milestones:

Language grows very fast now. Toddlers use more words in a row. They can answer harder questions. “What do you do when you are hungry?”

Tips:

- Ask questions with more than a yes or no answer. This helps children share their ideas.
- Ask toddlers to tell you a story from the pictures.
- Play lots of pretend games. Act out a trip to the doctor or fix a toy car.
- Two-year-olds have lots of big feelings. You can use books to help your child learn to name and manage their feelings. Ask a librarian or your child’s teacher for ideas!
- Try simple fact books about animals or cars. Choose a topic that your child is interested in.

Every chat, book, and song helps your child grow. Your time and words are the building blocks for a lifetime of talking and connection.

If you have concerns about your child’s language,
Talk to your baby’s healthcare provider or one of the professionals supporting your family.

Receive messages like this on your phone

Text **SPARKS**
to **274 448**