

Preschool Language Learning

Throughout the preschool years, young children continue to acquire and use new and more complex language abilities as part of interactions with other children and adults. You can boost children's language learning by increasing their opportunities to engage in conversations and by both encouraging and supporting their language use during everyday classroom interactions.

Watch a video of this Learning Way

Learning Way: Supporting Preschoolers' Language Learning

- Identify the different classroom activities that match children's interests and provide them opportunities and reasons to communicate with others. Provide children lots of opportunities to participate in those interest-based activities.
- During interest-based activities, pay particular attention to what interests a child. Follow the child's lead, and shift your attention to what captures the child's attention.
- Pay attention to when and how a child vocalizes or attempts to communicate with you and others. Notice the language the child uses to express ideas, wishes, needs, and requests. Focus your attention on how the child describes events and experiences.
- Respond positively when a child tries to communicate with you. Show your interest and enthusiasm in what he or she is trying to tell you. Describe what the child is doing, repeat the child's verbalizations, or join in and engage in a reciprocal your turn-my turn interaction.
- During interactions with a child, encourage the child to elaborate on his or her verbalization by asking open-ended questions about the child's interest. Repeat what the child says, adding new words and information. Make your responses slightly more complex than the child's verbalizations. Do something silly or surprising that gets the child to say something different.
- Provide many opportunities for children to use newly learned language competencies during everyday classroom activities with you and other children. Join in conversations with the children during everyday classroom activities and routines.
- Provide opportunities for word play by engaging the children in rhyming games and guessing games, doing finger plays, singing silly songs, or naming opposites. Encourage children to tell you about an interesting experience of the day, retell the story of a favorite book, or create an original story.

A Quick Peek

As children in the classroom settled into their morning playtime, Marni, the classroom teacher, noticed Stefan reaching for the puppets that he loved. "I see you found something fun to do this morning, Stefan," Marni commented. Stefan said, "I have puppets!" Then Marni replied, "Yes! You have two puppets!" Stefan held a puppet out to her, and Marni looked at him expectantly. "Will you make a puppet show for me?" asked Stefan. "Let's make a show together," Marni said. As they played, Marni asked questions, encouraging Stefan to have his puppet tell about what he had done that morning and what was going to happen in the afternoon. As the two puppets sang a song together, Marni paused to have Stefan complete phrases and rhymes in the song. Shortly, Marni said, "Do you think anyone else would like to play with the puppets too?" Stefan nodded, took the puppets, and said, "We can have a big show!" Marni knew that Stefan loved putting on puppet shows with his friends, and said, "What fun!" Stefan called, "Show time!" to his friends Julian and Miguel. They gathered the puppets around the puppet theater and planned how they would have the puppets sing the song Stefan had just practiced.



You'll know it's working if ...

- Children join and stay involved in conversations with you
- Children get excited and show enthusiasm about using language and interacting with you
- Children increase the complexity of language they use in everyday interactions with you

For more ideas, consult colleagues or explore online resources, including the idea-page series "[Enhancing Children's Language Development in Preschool Classrooms](#)" from Arizona State University.