

Build Your Toddler's Language with the 5 R's

Responsive, Rich talk – at a Rate that is right for the child. Clear Referents for new words, and lots of Repetition.

Responsive talk: Talk *with* your child, not *at* her. Try to get her to talk or babble back.

- Find lots of time for relaxed conversation. Use the language that is most comfortable for you.
- Listen carefully to what your child may be trying to say.
- Respond to your toddler's gestures and babbles, and especially to anything that sounds like a word. If he points to his bottle and says "ba," you might say, "Here's your BOTTLE," as you give it to him.
- Follow your child's lead. Talk about what she is interested in at the moment.
- Try to keep the conversation going. If your child changes the subject, follow his lead.
- Minimize screen time when your child is first learning to talk – unless she is using the screen to have a real conversation!

Rich talk: Build your child's vocabulary with words that are interesting and fun to say.

- Little children love big words – and the impressed reaction they get when they use them. Celebrate your child's growing language – and give him more!
- Talk with your child about things that interest you, as well as what interests him.
- Read together a lot! Encourage your child to participate by turning pages, pointing to and naming pictures, making noises, acting out parts of the story, and even saying some of the words.
- Ask questions that make your child to think. Help her put her wishes, opinions, and ideas into words.
- Think, imagine, and wonder out loud. Soon your toddler will, too.
- Pretend and be silly as you play and have fun together.

A Rate that is right for the child: Toddlers need time to process what you say and put their thoughts in words.

- Slow down – and really listen. Give your toddler time to respond to what you say.
- Expand your toddler's babbles into words and her single words or "toddler speak" word combinations into short sentences.
- As your toddler points out things that interest her, add just a bit more information or description.
- Take breaks and breathers in your conversations.
- Give your child time to repeat words you say that might be new for him.
- Follow your child's lead. You will naturally find opportunities to stretch her language as you talk and play together.

Clear Referents: Help your child know what you are talking about and what key words refer to.

- Talk about what you and your child are looking at together.
- Point to things you are talking about.
- Talk with your hands. Use signs and gestures.
- Demonstrate what you mean as you say it.
- Explain and show what new words mean. Connect to what children already know.
- Give children clues that help them figure out what new words mean.

Repetition: Toddlers love to do things over and over. It helps them learn and remember!

- Tell stories about the past together. Talk about what just happened -- and what happened a while ago. Encourage your child to add details, and to tell more of the story with each retelling.
- Take pictures. Talk about what you each remember as you look at them with your child.
- Sing songs with repeating verses and patterns. Sing favorites over and over together until your child knows the words.
- Make up new verses to favorite songs.
- Give children lots of chances to hear and use new words, in different contexts and languages.
- Read your child's favorite books with him over and over again. Talk about the story and pictures. Add your own rituals, like saying "night, night" to the baby or "the end."