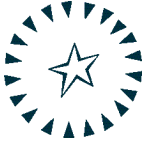


Early Words



training initiative

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Session Objectives

You will:

- Understand milestones of typical development of language and literacy during the toddler years (18 months - 3 years).
- Learn when to be concerned about a toddler's language development.
- Learn strategies for encouraging toddler's language development.
- Learn strategies for reading with toddlers.
- Learn five activities you can use right away in your programs.

Reflective Activity

- What is charming about talking with toddlers?
- What is challenging about talking with toddlers?

- What is charming about reading with toddlers?
- What is challenging about reading with toddlers?

- How do you handle the challenges?

Ages and Stages of Language and Literacy Development

For more language and literacy accomplishments of typical toddlers, see *Starting Out Right* page 59.

Older toddlers:

- are adding many new words to their vocabularies,
- are learning to talk in sentences (although they are often not complete),
- are learning how to carry on conversations with adults and other toddlers (although their peers may not always notice or respond to their attempts at conversation),
- can say a lot with just two words, and
- are trying to figure out the grammar of their language.

They often:

- use the “wrong” words when trying to describe things (calling a “goat” a “dog” or insisting that a boy with long hair is a girl).
- say words (sentences) in the right order even though the grammar is “wrong” or incomplete (“I down stairs.”) and
- make common errors in pronunciation of some sounds (the letters: l and r, for example)

They can:

- recognize familiar books by the cover,
- understand that books are handled in particular ways (pages are to be turned, the things that are said relate to the pictures on the page),
- name objects in books and talk about the characters,
- identify letters as letters even though the name of the letter may be wrong (identifying an “a” as a “t”).

They enjoy:

- rhymes, rhythms, repetitions, and singing,
- making up stories,
- pretending to read stories,
- scribbling and writing with pencils, pens, and fine markers
- watching you write or draw things for them, and
- hearing you read to them.

Ages and Stages Notes

When Should You Be Concerned?

- First, remember that every child learns to talk with his/her own speed and unique characteristics.

For instance, many children between 18 and 24 months are starting to put two words together. However some children just don't seem to want to talk, even though they understand most of what is said to them.

If a child seems to understand nearly everything you say, but doesn't talk much, there is probably no need to worry.

Some behaviors to watch out for include:

- a child who will not make eye contact, do not engage in conversation, or do not seem to want to communicate. Remember that some cultures believe that children should not look an adult in the eye. But, if a child avoids your eyes and also resists any interaction with you, you should mention your concerns to the parent.
- a child between two and three who cannot name basic objects or objects that are a regular part of his/her life (chair, shoe, eyes, nose, milk, juice) may need some attention.
- speech that is very difficult to understand. All children at this age say things that are hard to understand, but they also say many things that can be understood by most adults. If a child can *only* be understood by his/her parent or primary caregiver, he/she may need some assistance from a speech and language professional.

To arrange a free hearing test for a child, contact Denise Woods from Multnomah Education Service District at 503-262-4100 or Portland State Audiology Clinic at 503-725-3070.

Toddlers' Language Development

Toddlers are hungry for words.

- It is estimated that older toddlers are learning about 9 new words a day (that's around 63 new words a week)!

They have to learn quickly. By the age of four, the average child will know about 5,000 words.

- Toddlers learn new words from the people around them.

Talk, talk, talk to toddlers! The more things you say and the more words you use, the more words they will learn.

- Stick with the familiar.

Toddlers are just starting to organize what they know with what they can say. When you talk about familiar objects or activities, toddlers are better able to participate in the conversation.

- Just when you think they are not listening...

Toddlers are often very busy. They may appear to be ignoring you. Don't be fooled! Children listen and pay attention in many different ways (not just sitting still, looking at you).



Take and Use Activity:
It feels...

As toddlers learn more words, they are learning ways of describing the things around them. They may tell you that something is hot, or cold, or soft.

Create a sensory box with things that are rough, smooth, coarse, stringy, fuzzy, hairy, hard, soft, furry, spongy, prickly, wiry, grainy, crinkly, sandy, velvety, satiny, or bumpy.

Talk about things that are slimy, sticky, crunchy, slick, slippery, or gooey.



Take and Use Activity: I Spy

Toddlers love to find things. Playing “I spy” helps to build listening skills in a finding game.

Start simple. For instance you might say, “I spy with my little eye, a teddy bear.” Ask the child to point to the teddy bear and give them lots of praise when they find it.

As children get older and more familiar with the game, you can make your statements more abstract. For instance,

“I spy with my little eye, something red/blue/green/yellow.”

“I spy with my little eye, something that says, ‘moo’.”

“I spy with my little eye, something to drink with.”

Starting Out Right (pp. 19-20) has examples of other fun language and literacy activities that can be done with toddlers.

Tips for Encouraging Toddlers to Use Their Language

Expand what a child says to you.

Toddlers can express a lot with only two words (“more juice”, “car go”). You can help children fill in the blanks by expanding what they say into a complete sentence (“Would you like some more juice?” “Wow, look at that car go!”)

Extend what a child says to you.

When a toddler says something to you, you can extend what he/she says to add new information. If the child says “cow” while pointing to a picture, you could respond, “That is a cow! It’s a brown cow.”

Repeat what a child says to you.

Repeating what a child has just said to you helps the child figure out what you are saying because it must have something to do with what she just said.

Use simple statements to describe your actions and the children’s actions.

“I’m going to get my coat on now and then we’ll go outside.” The more you use language around young children, the more opportunities they have to learn new words.

Use simple questions to help children extend their stories or interactions.

You can say things like, “and then what happened?”, “and who else was there?”, or “what else did you see?” These questions encourage children to add more and more to what they are saying to you. Before you know it, they have told you a story.

Ask questions that encourages the child to “fill in” the blanks or finish the sentence.

For instance, you might say, “And the duck says...” If the child does not respond, then you fill in the blank. “Quack, Quack.” The child will often repeat back what you say. Use the intonation of your voice to indicate that you are looking for them to say something.



Remember!

This is supposed to be fun. It’s not a test! If a child gives you the “wrong” answer, give them positive reinforcement for their contribution.



Take and Use Activity: I've Got Rhythm and Music

The rhythms of songs are an excellent way to spark children's awareness of language and sound. Songs for children that encourage interaction are great ways to help them learn language and coordination at the same time.

Songs that repeat words and that have movements to go with them help children who are learning English as their second language.

For example, sing the Teddy Bear Song:

Teddy bear, Teddy bear, turn around.
Teddy bear, Teddy bear, touch the ground
Teddy bear, Teddy bear, show your shoe.
Teddy bear, Teddy bear that will do.
Teddy bear, Teddy bear, brush your hair
Teddy bear, Teddy bear, climb the stair
Teddy bear, Teddy bear, reach for the sky
Teddy bear, Teddy bear, wave goodbye.

Or the Itsy, Bitsy Spider

The itsy bitsy spider went up the water spout

(Put your thumbs and forefingers on both hands together and twist them while moving up “the spout”)

Down came the rain

(hands over your head, fingers spread, bring them down)

and washed the spider out.

(move your hands away from your body as though pushing some thing out and away from you)

Out came the sun

(put your arms up over your head in a circle)

And dried out all the rain

(hands over your head, spread your fingers and wiggle them while bringing your hands down).

And the itsy bitsy spider went up the spout again.

(Put your thumbs and forefingers on both hands together and twist them while moving up “the spout”)

More super song ideas for toddlers can be found in *Starting Out Right* page 22.

Toddlers' Literacy Development

There are many different ways to “read” a story to toddlers.

- Talk about the pictures. There is no rule that says you must read the words on the page.
- Read only part of the words on each page.
- Start off by reading to one toddler. The others will likely come over to see what is happening. Finishing reading and start again, this time involving the new comers.

Choose books written for toddlers such as,

- board books,
- books with repetition and rhyme,
- books with bright, clear pictures,
- books with familiar stories or characters, and
- books you have created with the children.

Involve children in the book reading.

- Have children make noise to go with the story.
- Ask children questions about the story.
- During repetitive stories, encourage children to tell the story with you.

Create a print rich environment.

- Label items in the classroom at the children's eye level: the table, chairs, bathroom, dramatic play area props, music center, etc.
- Offer opportunities for toddlers to use writing materials. Be prepared for a mess. Talk about your plans with parents. Ask parents to send a set of painting clothes or ask if they would mind if their child painted with only diapers or underwear on. Use washable markers and paints (they really do wash out!).

For more creative ideas on promoting literacy for toddlers, see pages 34-37 in *Starting Out Right*.

Develop book-reading routines.

- Try to establish a reading routine. You could always start off with the same simple song or finger play. Something that lets the children know, "it's time for books."
- Once you have a routine, the older toddlers will find it much easier to come and listen to a book. They will have expectations for what will happen.



Take and Use Activity: Writing Stories

Give children a variety of pictures cut out from magazines (animals, pictures of families, children playing, colorful foods, nature scenes) or ask parents for family pictures that they don't want any more.

Let children choose a picture and glue it onto a sheet of paper. Ask the child to tell a story of what s/he thinks is going on in the picture.

Write the child's words under the picture exactly as the child says, without correcting or changing the grammar. Then read the story back to the child.

Write a story with the child as the central character. "Once there was a little girl named Anna.

Anna had a mama named _____ and a granny named _____, and a cat named _____. Anna likes to go to the store with her mama. They like to buy _____.



Take and Use Activity: Water Painting

Scribbles and doodles are the building blocks of children's writing skills. Providing children with writing materials (paper, pens, pencil, etc.) is very important, even for toddlers.

However, sometimes the thought of bringing out pens and paint with toddlers can be a little too much even for the most energetic provider. On sunny, warm days try water painting outside as a no mess option.

Take buckets of water and larger sized paintbrushes outside. Children dip the brushes in the water and can then "paint" on the sidewalk, driveway, or even the house.

How To Talk To Parents About Their “Pre-reading” Concerns

Some parents may be concerned that you are not teaching their child their letters, how to spell their names, etc. This is understandable. Parents want to be assured that their children will be ready for school.

Let parents know that you understand their feelings. Show them the many ways that you are creating an environment to help them learn. Lend them your *Starting Out Right* book. Be sure to tell parents when their child learns an important pre-literacy skill (recognizing a letter in his/her name, “reading” a book to the other children, and so forth).

You can find some good language and literacy activities to give to parents to do with their toddlers on pages 30-33 in *Starting Out Right*.

Closing

A hundred years from now it will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of house I lived in, or the kind of care I drove, but the world might be a different place because I was important in the life of a child.

Anonymous

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“We don’t drill toddlers with their ABCs. Instead, we create a language-rich environment. We have circle time, when we sing songs and use hand gestures to accompany the words. When I read “The Three Bears”, I don’t just tell stories. I’ll show them three stuffed animals. I’ll find three chairs. When the kids do begin to speak, I try to figure out what they’re saying and repeat it back — even if it’s not entirely comprehensible. I help them understand that language has a lot of power and they can get what they want to using language.”

Scott Hirose, Teacher/therapist

Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children’s Reading Success