

Sound Off Together!

The very first sounds infants make are the beginnings of social communication. Encouraging your infant or toddler to use sounds and later words to let you know what he or she wants or needs can help him or her to enter a world of shared interaction. By noticing and responding to your child's attempts to communicate, you can lay the groundwork for language learning.

Learning Guide: Encouraging Early Language Learning

- Notice the sounds and words your baby or toddler uses during everyday activities and routines. Pay attention to your child's cooing sounds (e.g., ah, ooh, eee), babbling sounds (e.g., ba-ba-ba, ma-ma-ma), jabbering (e.g., "made-up" words or parts of words), or simple words.
- During everyday activities, attend to what interests your child. Watch for signs that tell you that your child is noticing the sounds and objects around him or her. Pay attention to what captures your child's attention.
- When your baby or toddler makes a sound or uses a word, assume that he or she is trying to get your attention, ask for something, express a feeling, or interact with you in some way. Position yourself so you can look at your child and have a face-to-face interaction.
- Respond in a positive way to the sounds or words your infant or toddler makes. Imitate your child's sounds or words. Use repetitive sounds or talk to your child in a way that exaggerates the sounds in words (e.g., baby-talk).
- Join in your child's sound play and have a "your turn/my turn" interaction with your child. Show your delight at your child's vocalizations with praise, smiles, laughter, touches, or hugs. Responding positively to your child will help your child continue to vocalize or use words and learn that interacting is fun.
- During any interaction, change the sounds or words you use after your child's cooing, babbling, or jabbering. Change your response by using new and different sounds, sound patterns, or words to catch your child's attention and encourage your baby or toddler to make different sounds or say new words.

Watch a video of this Learning Guide

You'll know the practice is working if ...

- Your child stays involved in back-and-forth sound play with you
- Your child gets excited when interacting with you
- Your child increases the number and kinds of sounds or words that he or she uses when interacting with you

A Quick Peek

Monet sat her 9-month old, Sam, facing her on her lap, knowing that this was one of Sam's favorite times of the day. Sam was happy and squealed, "Baah!" Monet smiled and made the same squealing sound. Each time Sam made a sound, Monet looked at him and repeated the same sound. Right away they were absorbed in a back-and-forth game, with Monet repeating each sound Sam made. Monet then answered Sam's "Baah!" with "Baah, baah, baah!" Sam stopped for a moment, surprised by this change. Then he laughed and said, "Baah, baah, baah!" Monet and Sam both laughed with delight as they continued to talk back and forth to one another.



For more ideas, ask an early interventionist, home visitor, teacher, therapist, or another experienced parent. Visit the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) website for [**12 Ways to Support Language Development for Infants and Toddlers**](#).