

Child Social Communication

The first sounds infants make are the beginnings of social communication. Encouraging infants and toddlers to use vocalizations and words to communicate can help them become social partners in everyday interactions. By noticing and responding to children's attempts to communicate, you can promote their language learning.

Learning Guide: Promoting Early Language-Learning Skills

- Observe the social behavior infants and toddlers use during everyday classroom activities and routines. Pay attention to children's cooing (e.g., ah, ooh, eee), babbling (e.g., ba-ba-ba, ma-ma-ma), jabbering (e.g., invented words or sounds, parts of words), and simple words.
- Attend to what interests a child while engaged in everyday activities. Observe the child to identify the sounds he or she produces. Follow the child's lead and shift your attention to what captures the child's attention.
- Interpret a child's vocal initiations as attempts to get your attention, convey a need, express a feeling, or interact with you in some way. Position yourself so you can make eye contact with the child and have a face-to-face interaction.
- Respond positively to infant and toddler vocalizations. Use vocal imitation or respond in a repetitive and exaggerated way, alternating between adult speech and baby-talk.
- Join in a child's vocal play and engage in a your-turn/my-turn interaction with the child. Use expressions of praise and animated positive affect in response to the child's vocalizations. Positive responsiveness to the child's communicative attempts will encourage the child to continue to vocalize, sustain interactions, and facilitate language production.
- During any interaction with a child, change the vocalizations you use in response to children's cooing, babbling, or jabbering. Vary your response to expand children's vocalizations and provide them models of different or more complex sounds, sound patterns, and words. These kinds of expansions will capture children's interest, encourage their vocal elaborations, and promote new language and social-communicative interactive competencies.

Watch a video of this Learning Guide

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

- Children stay engaged in your-turn/my-turn interactions with you
- Children get excited when interacting with you
- Children vocalize more and use more varied vocalizations when interacting with you

A Quick Peek



Five-month-old Addie seemed to love the sound of her own voice and entertained her teachers, Jewell and Sammi, with her delightful cooing. During music time, as Jewell and Sammi clapped softly to the music, Addie cooed, "Eeeee." Jewell smiled and repeated Addie's sound, encouraging Addie to continue. Addie squealed and kicked her legs in excitement as she and Jewell began cooing back and forth with one another. Soon Jewell responded, "Oooo, eeee, ahhh." Addie looked surprised, then cooed, "Oooo, ahhhh." Everyone was so delighted, they laughed and clapped for Addie.

Learn more ways to support the language and communication skills of infants and toddlers by visiting an [informative web page from the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute](#).