

Parent Aware Tip Sheets

Supporting Children's Language Learning

Children are constantly learning. While children have individual learning styles, child care providers/early educators can enrich and enhance all children's learning of language.

What steps can you take to support children's language learning?

- **Talk to children as much as possible.** If you aren't used to doing this, it can be difficult to know what to say. Start by talking to children about what they are doing, feeling, seeing, hearing, tasting, etc. This ensures that the talk children are hearing is meaningful to them. Make sure to talk to children during both routines and play. Adults can converse with young infants through verbal play (engaging in activities using sounds and words in a playful way) and responding when a child vocalizes, taking turns back and forth.
- **Give children plenty of time to respond to your talk.** Young children need time to process what is being said to them before they are able to formulate a response. Remember that children may use nonverbal communication as well, such as crying, pointing, reaching arms out to be picked up, or displaying facial expressions. This type of communication is just as important as verbal communication, and staff should respond to it as well.
- **Use a wide range of descriptive words.** Describing what children see, hear, feel, etc. is a great place to start. For example, if an airplane flies overhead while the group is outside, the teacher could say, "Look! You see a white airplane with red stripes! It's flying fast through the blue sky."
- **Respond to children's needs in a timely and positive manner.** This helps them to learn that others hear and understand their communication, both verbal and nonverbal. When adults fulfill children's needs quickly, such as when they point to something they want, it is less likely that children will become upset and start to cry.

Remember that responding negatively to children's communication, such as getting angry when they cry or using a harsh tone, will not encourage children to communicate with adults and does not help to promote positive relationships between adults and children. Try to view your response to children from their perspective and consider how you would feel if a friend responded to you in this way. **Speak to children in a way that is consistent with how you would like to be spoken to.**