



# Talk, Read and Sing With Your Child Every Day

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## The Importance Talking, Reading and Singing

Babies are born with brains that are ready to learn and grow. Important brain development occurs when parents talk, read and sing to babies. Babies cannot say words or speak sentences clearly. However, they learn and understand words spoken to them. Speaking warmly and reading, in any language, to your children from birth will help them build a strong vocabulary. Babies and children feel safe, calm and learn to control their emotions when they hear their caregivers sing. By talking, reading and singing with your child every day from birth, you create a strong emotional bond with your child. These activities also increase your children's language, reading, math, thinking and social skills. These skills are important for children's lifelong learning and success in school.

## Children Learn from Social Activities in the Family

Birth to age 7 is an important period for development of language and social skills. In a landmark study in the 1990s, scientists found a 30 million word gap between low and high income families. By age 4, children from low income families had heard 30 million fewer words, and this gap was related to language development and later school success. Research has also found that babies learn language and how to express emotions by face-to-face interactions with caregivers — not through watching TV. Regular family talks and fun activities, such as reading and singing together, also encourage children to develop stronger bonds with parents.

## Your Child Loves to Hear Your Voice and it Helps Them Learn

Babies and toddlers learn about their surroundings by looking and listening. They tune into child-directed talk when adults use simple phrases and speak slowly with exaggerated tone (also called baby talk). Babies often respond by babbling and cooing. They observe the sounds and facial expressions



when adults talk and read to them. By imitating the movement of your lips, mouth and tongue, they learn to create sounds (dada, baba) and speak words. By 18 months most babies start using and joining two words together to talk to adults (bye-bye, my toy).

Toddlers (1 to 3 years) and preschoolers (3 to 5 years) are fast learners. They learn about sound patterns, grammar, new words and their meanings from regularly talking with their caregivers. Toddlers can learn 10 or more words each day.

## Tips for Talking to Infants and Toddlers

- Talk gently to your baby about things all around you and what you are doing, when feeding, bathing, changing diapers or on walks.
- Make direct eye contact, smile and gently respond to babies' babbling, cooing and crying.
- Play games like Peek-a-boo and pat-a-cake with your baby.
- Use everyday objects (plastic cups, containers or wooden spoons) as toys for your baby and use name objects.
- Label things and describe actions around your baby. "This is your blue blanket." "We will get in the car and drive to grandma's house."



### Tips for Talking to Preschoolers and School-Age Children

- Talk to your child about daily events, activities or their interests.
- Point to and name new or common items at home or outside.
- When talking, get down to your child's level, make eye contact, take turns and give your child time to respond.
- Respond positively by answering your child's naturally curious "why," "how," "where" and other questions.
- Ask your child questions that require thinking. "How does it rain?" "Where do birds go at night?"
- During talks use numbers, label shapes and name colors. Example: "Would you like one or two crackers?" "Bring me your big green ball."
- Use interesting words and describe features, and size of objects, "Is the big book heavy for you?" "These blocks are triangles with three sides."
- Talk about directions, activities and emotions. "Your balloon popped, you must be sad!" "Take your sock off of your left foot." "You kicked the ball under the table."

### Your Child Enjoys Reading and Singing at Home Everyday

All children enjoy music and listening to stories. Babies and toddlers learn talking and reading skills and are ready for kindergarten when caregivers sing songs with rhyming or repetitive words and read books pointing to pictures, colors and numbers. They learn to understand, show and respond to feelings such as happiness, sadness, anger and fear when the caregivers talk about the how characters in the story feel or how they would feel if something in the story happened to them. Children learn thinking skills when parents talk about the characters in the story or ask them "what do you think will happen next?" Reading every day to babies, toddlers and young children helps increase their vocabulary and develop

memory. These skills are important for children to succeed in school and in life.

### Tips for Reading, and Singing with Infants and Toddlers

- Make a routine to read books and sing to your baby every day at bedtime and/or bath time.
- Sing fun songs or read books about your child's activities when changing from one activity to another.
- Point to and name pictures, colors and animals in books.
- Let babies hold board or waterproof books; encourage them to touch pictures and characters in the book.
- Sing rhyming and playful songs while playing, changing diapers or during bath time to comfort your baby.
- Sing softly to your baby when she is feeding, sleepy or tired to help her feel safe and calm.
- Use voices and act out the stories when reading books, telling stories or singing songs.

### Tips for Reading, and Singing with preschoolers and school aged children

- Make a routine for reading and singing daily with your child for 10 to 15 minutes at bedtime. Let her pick a book from those at home or the local library.
- Point to letters and words in the books while reading and ask your child to read aloud the words he knows.
- Trace the words on the page from left to right to train children's eyes for reading.
- When reading story books, ask your children questions about what they think will happen next to predict future events.
- Bring your child to story-telling sessions at the library. At home, make a family ritual for story-telling and ask your child to tell a favorite story.
- Sing playful songs with numbers and rhyming words to help your child learn math and language skills.
- Create your own songs or sing child's favorite songs for bath-time, bedtime, car-time or just for fun.

### Benefits of Talking, Reading and Singing in Multiple Languages

Babies can learn more than one language from birth. Research has found that being bi- or multi-lingual in early child-





hood increases intellectual, social and emotional development. Understanding and speaking multiple languages increases children's vocabulary, thinking and math skills. Talking in two or more languages allows children to establish strong ties with family members and connect with others in their community and school. Children can learn to talk in your family's native language at home. They will learn English in school and from English-speaking friends and community members.

### **Tips for Bilingual and Multi-Lingual Families**

- Talk to your child every day in your native language even if your child prefers to speak in English.
- Attend cultural events with your child where native language is used.
- Share your culture, traditions, festivals and food within your community, friends and teachers at school.
- Read to your child books in your native language. Ask school age-children to read to you.
- Look for children's books available in your language at a local library.
- Bring your child to bilingual storytelling events in your local library.

- Share family stories with your children and ask them to share their stories with you in your native language
- Sing with your child the native folk songs, poems, rhymes and chants. Create playful songs in your native language and sing them together.
- Dance to popular music from your culture and sing with your children.

### **Conclusion**

Regularly talking, singing and reading to babies starting at birth and even during pregnancy helps their brain develop. When families talk, read and sing together emotional bonding occurs. Talk to your children in your native language. Children can learn multiple languages at the same time. Being multi-lingual can benefit children in school and helps maintain strong connection with family and friends.

### **Resources**

- <http://talkingisteaching.org/>
- <https://www.ed.gov/early-learning/talk-read-sing>
- <http://toosmall.org/>
- <http://www.ar-glr.net/talk/>
- <https://www.text4baby.org/>

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Extension carries out programs in the broad categories of agriculture, natural resources and environment; family and consumer sciences; 4-H and other youth; and community resource development. Extension staff members live and work among the people they serve to help stimulate and educate Americans to plan ahead and cope with their problems.

Some characteristics of the Cooperative Extension system are:

- The federal, state, and local governments cooperatively share in its financial support and program direction.
- It is administered by the land-grant university as designated by the state legislature through an Extension director.
- Extension programs are nonpolitical, objective, and research-based information.
- It provides practical, problem-oriented education for people of all ages. It is designated to take the knowledge of the university to those persons who do not or cannot participate in the formal classroom instruction of the university.
- It utilizes research from university, government, and other sources to help people make their own decisions.
- More than a million volunteers help multiply the impact of the Extension professional staff.
- It dispenses no funds to the public.
- It is not a regulatory agency, but it does inform people of regulations and of their options in meeting them.
- Local programs are developed and carried out in full recognition of national problems and goals.
- The Extension staff educates people through personal contacts, meetings, demonstrations, and the mass media.
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