

# CREATING LANGUAGE-RICH ENVIRONMENTS FOR INFANTS



Speech is one of the most important and complex skills a child will learn. It seems to happen naturally but, in fact, as a caregiver, you have a very important role to play. The more you talk to an infant, the more you facilitate their language development—in both their home language and in any new language!

## **LANGUAGE IS THE KEY TO LEARNING.**

Research has shown that children's development of language is a crucial first step in their ability to think and learn. Most brain development occurs between birth and age two. As an infant absorbs new sights, textures, scents and sounds, the connections in their brain that make learning possible multiply and become stronger. If an infant doesn't use these connections, or doesn't use them enough, the connections can be lost forever. A good way to stimulate and strengthen an infant's brain is to talk to them.

## **IMITATION IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF LEARNING LANGUAGE.**

Infants learn to talk by listening to voices and working out the sounds that make up words. The more you talk to infants the greater chance the infant has of picking up words and learning to speak. Always try to listen and respond when an infant says something, even if it's just a string of noises. Those early babbles are an infant's first attempts at words. Mimic the infant's sounds and show genuine interest in what they have to say.

## **LANGUAGE HELPS INFANTS TO FORM ATTACHMENTS.**

Talking to an infant will help them feel safe, secure and loved. It will also help you to bond with them and form an attachment. An emotional attachment is also an essential factor for learning. The infant will love hearing your voice and will respond to the warmth and love reflected in your words as you talk to them. Children who can understand others and express their thoughts and feelings are also more likely to have good relationships with other people and to develop strong self-esteem.

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## HERE ARE SOME STRATEGIES TO HELP IMPROVE YOUR COMMUNICATION WITH INFANTS:

- Vary your voice tone and expression. This will hold the infant's attention.
- Be animated. For example, widen your eyes, smile and raise your eyebrows.
- Keep it simple. Try not to overload them with too many words at once.
- Observe the infant as you say something.
- Wait and give the infant time to absorb what you've said. This may take up to 20 seconds.
- Listen to the infant's response, then respond to them.

## TO CREATE A LANGUAGE-RICH ENVIRONMENT:

- Talk about what you're doing throughout the day—especially during regular routines.
- Talk about the things the infant shows an interest in. The infant will show you what they're interested in by looking, pointing, crawling, walking to an object and trying to grasp or reach for an object.
- Have fun with nursery rhymes and songs, especially those with actions. Sing to the infant in the language that you know best. It doesn't have to be English. At this stage it's the sounds that are important.
- Cuddle up together and read a favourite book or talk about the pictures.

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