

10 Strategies to help your toddler talk

A Practical Parent Guide from a Speech-Language Pathologist

1. Follow Your Child's Lead

What it is:

Joining your child in the activity they have already chosen instead of directing or changing the play.

Why it works:

Children learn best when they are interested and engaged. Shared attention increases motivation and supports language learning.

How to do it:

Sit at your child's level, observe what they are doing, and join in by commenting on their actions without interrupting or redirecting.

Example:

If your child is spinning a car wheel, you might say, "Spin... spin..." while doing the same action.

2. Pause and Wait

What it is:

Deliberately pausing after you speak or model language to give your child time to respond.

Why it works:

Children need processing time to understand language and attempt communication. Pausing creates space for interaction.

How to do it:

After modeling a word or phrase, wait silently while maintaining expectant eye contact.

Example:

During bubbles, say “More?” then pause for several seconds while looking at your child.

3. Model Language (Without Testing)

What it is:

Demonstrating language by describing what your child sees or does, rather than asking frequent questions.

Why it works:

Children learn language through meaningful exposure, not through being tested or prompted to answer.

How to do it:

Describe actions, objects, and routines using simple, natural language.

Example:

Instead of asking, “What is this?” say, “Dog is running.”

4. Use Fewer Words

What it is:

Simplifying your language to short, clear phrases that match your child’s level.

Why it works:

Reduced language load makes it easier for children to process, understand, and imitate speech.

How to do it:

Use 1–3 word phrases and emphasize key words.

Example:

Instead of “Let’s put the car in the garage,” say “Car in.”

5. Repeat Key Words Often

What it is:

Using the same important words multiple times during play or routines.

Why it works:

Repetition strengthens word recognition and supports memory and learning.

How to do it:

Choose 1–2 target words per activity and repeat them consistently.

Example:

While playing with bubbles: “Pop! Pop! Pop!”

6. Create Communication Opportunities

What it is:

Setting up situations where your child needs to communicate to get something.

Why it works:

When children have a reason to communicate, they are more likely to initiate interaction.

How to do it:

Pause, hold items slightly out of reach, or wait before fulfilling a request.

Example:

Hold a snack container and wait. Look at your child and say, “Open?” before helping.

7. Imitate Your Child (Build Connection First)

What it is:

Copying your child’s actions, sounds, or play behaviors.

Why it works:

Imitation builds social connection, attention, and turn-taking—foundational skills for communication.

How to do it:

Copy what your child is doing, then pause and observe their response.

Example:

If your child bangs a block, you bang a block too and wait for them to notice and respond.

8. Expand What Your Child Says

What it is:

Adding one or two words to what your child says to model the next level of language.

Why it works:

Expansion naturally supports vocabulary growth and sentence development without pressure.

How to do it:

Repeat your child's word and add a descriptive or functional word.

Example:

Child says "car" → You say "fast car."

9. Use People Games

What it is:

Interactive, face-to-face games that involve shared attention and predictable routines.

Why it works:

People-based interaction strengthens social communication more effectively than toys alone.

How to do it:

Play simple games with pauses, anticipation, and repetition.

Example:

Peek-a-boo: "Peek... (pause)... BOO!"

10. Read Books Interactively

What it is:

Engaging your child during reading by pointing, labeling, and pausing instead of reading every word.

Why it works:

Interactive reading builds vocabulary, comprehension, and engagement.

How to do it:

Point to pictures, name objects, and pause for your child to respond.



Week 8 Handout: 10
Strategies to help your
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Example:

While reading a book with animals, say “Dog... woof!” while pointing and waiting.

★ Key Reminder

Language development is not about doing more it's about **how you interact during everyday moments.**

Even **10–15 minutes per day** of intentional, responsive interaction can support meaningful progress over time.