

Preschool Speech & Language Development (Part I)

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How do children learn to talk?

Children begin communicating from the moment they are born. Their cries tell parents "I am hungry" or "I am uncomfortable" or "I am wet" before the newborn even understands the concept of food or comfort. As infants develop, they begin to use different cries to express different "needs". Infants use other forms of vocalizing, such as cooing and babbling, to communicate with parents. Infants can alter the loudness, pitch and frequency of their sounds to express different moods. Infants also use eye contact to form a bond with parents.

A Child's First Words

As an infant's understanding of his or her world grows, the infant finds that vocalizing sounds can be too limited to communicate about more complex ideas. Eventually, an infant begins to talk by imitating one of the thousands of words that he or she has heard since birth. Usually this "first word" is a meaningful object, such as "Mama" or "Dada". A child's first word does not usually go unnoticed. Anyone who has witnessed the big event is certain to make a big deal about baby's first word; following "Mama", a parent might say "Suzy said 'Mama' - good girl". An infant's first word is reinforced by parents' reactions. When an infant says other words, such as "drink", the child gets a drink and positive feedback from parents. The child begins to form a connection between using certain words and certain events happening: when a child says "Up" he or she gets picked up; when a child says "More" the parent continues doing whatever he or she was doing; when a child says "Bubble" another bubble appears. A child begins to develop a vocabulary of words which occur at the same time as an object or an event. Some typical early vocabulary words are up, ball, juice, eat, drink, please, no, and mine.

Why do children learn to talk?

Children use words, and learn to combine words into ideas so that they can express their needs and desires more precisely. When a child says "Ball", it could mean "Roll the ball", "I see the ball", "Where's the ball?", or "The ball is rolling." The child learns that combining two words together helps the listener understand his or her message more clearly. In turn, this message helps the child to get the desired results from the listener. Getting the desired results from the listener is the main reason that children and adults talk. By expressing our needs and desires to others, we try to satisfy them.

Learn more about speech and language development in **PRESCHOOL SPEECH & LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT (Part II)**.

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