



Promoting Communication Strategies

TALK

Tools for Advancing Language in Kids

PC TALK Strategy Manual

*Resources for Early Childhood Providers,
Teachers, and Families*

Dale Walker, Ph.D.
Kathryn Bigelow, Ph.D.

Juniper Gardens Children's Project
University of Kansas



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Amy Turcotte	Dwight Irvin	Sanna Harjusola-Webb
Anna Whaley	Emily Meyer	Sarah Behrens
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Juniper Gardens Children's Project
University of Kansas
444 Minnesota Ave., #300
Kansas City, KS 66101

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Words We Will Use

The following are words or terms used throughout this manual, and descriptions of their meaning:

Caregiver: Teacher, parent, caregiver, provider or any adult who interacts with young children.

Communication: Gestures, vocalizations, and/or words that have meaning

Daily Routines: Activities that we do with children on a regular basis – daily, or almost every day: eating, bedtime, washing up, diaper changes, playing, reading, etc.

DLL: (Dual Language Learner) A child that either has more than one language spoken at home, or has a different language spoken at home than the primary language of their classroom

Gestures: Any hand gesture or head nod generally recognized as meaningful within a given culture, such as nodding to indicate yes or no, pointing, or waving as a greeting, but excluding sign language

Vocalizations: Intentional vocalized sounds that are not recognizable words

Words: Any understood language - vocalized or signed - generally recognized as a word within a given culture, including slang and informal terms

Quick Links

PC TALK Website: talk.ku.edu

PC TALK Strategy Tools:

Poster: talk.ku.edu/tools/posters/

Videos: talk.ku.edu/tools/videos/

Strategy Handouts: talk.ku.edu/tools/strategy-handouts/

Activity Cards: talk.ku.edu/tools/activity-cards/

Caregiver Self-Checks: talk.ku.edu/tools/self-checks/

PC TALK Provider Tools:

Promoting Communication Observation System:

PC-Obs Dashboard: pcobs.ku.edu/

Intervention Delivery Checklist:
talk.ku.edu/data-tools-2/intervention-delivery-checklist/

Video Tutorials: talk.ku.edu/providertools/video-tutorials/

PC-Obs Mobile App and Web Dashboard: pcobs.ku.edu

PC-Obs System: <https://talk.ku.edu/data-tools-2/pcobs/>

PC TALK Coaching Supports: talk.ku.edu/providertools/coach-tools/

[PC TALK In Brief](#)

[PC TALK Tools Overview](#)

[Getting Started with PC TALK](#)

[Text Message Menu](#)

[PC Obs Quick Guide to Report Interpretation](#)

[Professional Development Sessions](#)

Introduction to PC TALK

Promoting Communication Tools for Advancing Language in Kids (PC TALK) is a toolkit of strategies and resources for promoting language and communication in young children. It is made up of eight naturalistic communication promoting strategies that can be used at home and in childcare settings to provide opportunities to infants, toddlers, and preschoolers to experience and practice language and communication naturally, throughout the day. PC TALK includes tools that early childhood professionals can use to teach about the language promoting strategies and support the use of the strategies throughout daily routines. The tools include a manual with handouts, posters, activity cards, and caregiver self-checks that can be shared with families and teachers for home and classroom use. Materials are available in English and Spanish.

About the PC TALK Data System

PC TALK also includes a data system that early childhood professionals can use to measure and document caregivers' use of the strategies and provide data-based feedback. The Promoting Communication Observation System (PC-Obs) is a mobile app and web-based data dashboard for collecting observational data of adult strategy use and child communication, and generating informative, easy to read graphs that can be shared with caregivers and inform intervention efforts over time.

Intended Use of Manual

This PC TALK manual was designed for early childhood professionals, such as coaches, teachers, and supervisors in center-based care settings, and coaches, early intervention providers, and home visitors delivering early childhood home-based services. Most of the sections within this manual were designed to be

handouts that can be printed off individually and shared with caregivers. The manual also includes guidance for professionals as they support families and teachers.

A Research-Based Intervention

The PC TALK strategies were developed based on decades of research on how caregivers support child language and communication development. The PC TALK tools were designed to be used flexibly, and the way in which they are used and shared with caregivers can be individualized as needed. Throughout the manual, we provide guidance on implementing PC TALK, but encourage you to use PC TALK along with, or integrated within your own program's early childhood curricula. The PC TALK strategies are also meant to be used continuously, and "grow with" children as their communication develops from infancy to toddler to preschool.

“When children have a variety of opportunities to engage...they are more likely to develop skills needed for success.”

What does the research say about communication and language development?

Decades of child development research have shown us that children's earliest language-learning environments have an impact on short- and long-term child communication outcomes. Research has demonstrated the importance of providing infants and young children with rich language-learning opportunities through daily interactions for both language and brain development.¹ When children have a variety of opportunities to engage in positive and nurturing language-learning interactions with adults, they are more likely to develop language, early literacy, and social skills needed for success later in school, and beyond.^{2,3}

Historical Precedents

A landmark study, conducted by Betty Hart and Todd Risley established the importance of early language experiences. Described in their book, *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Lives of American Children* (1995), these researchers measured the amount of language that children heard in their homes during monthly observations when children were between 6- and 36-months of age. Children who were exposed to higher quality and more frequent language-learning opportunities developed larger vocabularies compared to children who did not have such opportunities. Over time, those early differences in children's everyday language experiences made for large disparities in children's vocabulary growth over time. By the time children entered preschool, it was estimated that while some children were exposed to over 45 million words, others were exposed to only 10 million. These differences in early language experiences were found to be related to language, reading, and school achievement as children entered kindergarten and elementary school.⁵

Current Research

A large body of research since the Hart and Risley study has demonstrated that environments for young children should provide rich, varied language-learning opportunities.^{6,7,8} A number of effective intervention strategies have been found to promote language and early literacy,^{9,10} but research has also demonstrated that in practice, these effective strategies are only rarely used by teachers or parents.^{11,12,13,14}

Given the strong connections between early communication skills, social-emotional skills, and later language and literacy outcomes,^{15,16,17} our research group at the Juniper Gardens Children's Project at the University of Kansas has conducted a series of studies that have helped demonstrate that naturalistic communication interventions, when used frequently by parents and early educators, promote communication growth for young children. The PC TALK intervention is a product of this work.

A Naturalistic Approach

The PC TALK intervention uses a naturalistic

intervention approach^{18,19} to increase the frequency and the quality of early language experiences across daily activities for young children.²⁰ This means the strategies were designed to be used naturally, throughout the daily activities and routines that adults and children engage in throughout the day in home and child care settings. The language promoting strategies were developed from responsive intervention,²¹ prelinguistic and milieu teaching,^{22,23,24} and dialogic and shared book reading,^{25,26,27} which have extensive research support.

Flexibility and Adaptability

The intervention is designed to be maximally flexible. Strategy use can be individualized to the unique skills and needs of infants and young children, including those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The PC TALK strategies can be used in home and early childhood education settings and can be incorporated into early intervention and family support services. The strategies and resources were designed for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with typical development, with disabilities or delays, and who are dual language learners. In addition to the PC TALK strategies, key components of the PC TALK intervention include data-based feedback on adult and child communication, self-monitoring and implementation checklists, and progress monitoring to support adult engagement and implementation of the intervention. The PC TALK resources are a "tool kit," and providers and caregivers have flexibility in whether they use all the tools or just some of them.

Continuity

PC TALK aims to promote the continuity of intervention between home and early childhood learning environments. Research has demonstrated that when early educators use the intervention strategies in their classrooms and parents use the strategies at home, infants and toddlers communicate more frequently and have greater communication growth as documented in adult-child observations and through standardized assessments.²⁸ The PC TALK strategies have been designed so they can "grow with" children as their language and communication grows.

Language and Communication Development

As you begin to use PC TALK, it is important to consider a child's current level of communication and language development. For many children, language develops in a fairly similar manner, but this path can also be different for many children. While there are common milestones for language development, all children develop at their own pace. Some children will say their first word before turning one year old, while others might not say their first words until later. The range of what is considered "typical" is broad. For children with communication delays or disabilities, the range can be much larger. This process might also look a little different for children who are learning more than one language. The following includes general milestones that are typical for these age ranges. This is where the child's language environment comes in – having frequent and varied opportunities for communication can have a significant impact on child language and communication now and in the years to come.

Common Progression of Language Skills from Birth to Four

BIRTH

"Reflexive" behaviors, such as crying, grunting, or grasping. Sounds and behaviors become more intentional as children grow, and as the adults around them respond and interact with them.

0-3 Months

Begin to make pleasure sounds, have different cries based on their needs, and smile when they see a familiar face. Quiet or smile when spoken to. Begin to recognize voices.

4-6 Months

Use purposeful gestures, such as pointing or reaching. Begin to babble or vocalize excitement and displeasure using combinations of vowels and consonants.

12 Months

Begin to recognize words for common items and respond to simple requests.

12-36 Months

Vocalizations replaced by single-words, then increasing to 2-3 word sentences. Vocabulary continues to grow. Great deal of variability in language and vocabulary growth.

Preschool Years

Language is usually understandable. Most have words for many things in their environment. Generally understand what others say to them and can follow simple two-step requests.

Importance of Providing Opportunities to Experience and Engage in Language and Communication

When infants and toddlers have opportunities to hear and practice communication and are exposed to rich and varied vocabulary, they are more likely to communicate themselves. These early language experiences influence the developing infants' brains to build connections that form the basis for later language and cognitive development and ultimately lead to school success.

Research has shown that when infants and toddlers are exposed to language and communication in their home and in child care, that exposure:

- Predicts greater vocabulary size at age 3 and beyond
- Promotes social interaction
- Predicts kindergarten and early elementary school readiness
- Predicts reading and language skills by 3rd grade
- Helps to prevent problem behavior

Given what is known about the association between children's early communication skills, later language and literacy development, and eventual school success, it is important that parents and care providers have naturalistic strategies that are easy to use and fit within the daily routines and activities of infants and toddlers. Communicating with infants and toddlers by talking and signing to them, providing opportunities for them to initiate and respond, and engaging in reciprocal, or back-and-forth, interactions is very important for their future development. Parents and early childhood care and education providers are the best people to ensure that infants and toddlers have these language opportunities every day, throughout their day.

Adults can support the growth and development of child communication and language by providing a rich and engaging language environment throughout the activities they engage in every day. As children's communication grows, adult communication should also grow, becoming more complex and diverse, building in new vocabulary, and providing opportunities for more complex back-and-forth conversations.

Child

* points toward a dog *

Dog!

uh uh uh

twuck?

My toes.

Caregiver

You see a dog.

Yes, a big brown dog!

Up? You want to get up?

That truck is huge!

Your toes and my toes.

Using Daily Routines to Promote Communication

The PC TALK strategies were designed to be used by caregivers throughout daily routines and activities that adults and children engage in together. Daily routines are the activities we do with children on a regular basis – daily, or almost every day. They are the activities we do that become familiar to children, and can include eating breakfast each morning, getting dressed, changing diapers, playing on the floor together in the afternoon, taking a bath, and reading stories each night.

Some routines might be more structured or organized, such as circle time in an early childhood classroom, while others are much simpler and more flexible, like singing a familiar song during bath time or putting on a coat, having time to play outside after nap, or talking about food while preparing a meal. Daily routines and activities provide natural opportunities for children to learn more about themselves, their environment, and other people, and to practice communicating.

The predictability of our daily activities helps children to learn what is expected during different

activities and how to behave during those activities. When routines, such as mealtime, nap time, separating from a parent, and toileting, have built-in consistency, children learn to behave in a way that is appropriate for the routine. A goal in having predictable routines is to create a familiar, positive, and stimulating environment in which children can begin to explore.

Because of the regularity and predictability of routines, they can sometimes be carried out in a manner that does not take advantage of the natural teaching opportunities they present. It is easy for them to become - well, boring. Instead, daily routines can become learning opportunities when we plan for what might be taught during such routines.

As children grow and develop, routines also change gradually to match the child's level of development. For example, new activities may be introduced and talk can become more complex. It is important to build opportunities for flexibility and an occasional surprise into routines and activities so that children find them new and interesting.

Sample Daily Routines and Activities

							
Play Time	Personal Care	Outdoor Play	Eating & Drinking	Outings	Household Chores	Books	Structured Activities
Puzzles	Waking up	Ride-ons	Bottle time	Car rides	Laundry	Reading together	Circle time
Blocks	Diapering	Playing ball	Breakfast	Bus rides	Wiping up tables	Playing with cloth or board books	Music time
Pretend play	Potty time	Swinging	Lunch	Walks	Throwing away trash	Talking about pictures	Library story time
Games	Dressing	Sliding	Dinner	Visiting family and friends	Picking up toys		Art
Baby dolls	Nap time	Water play	Snacks	Shopping	Putting dishes in sink		Playdough
Cars	Brushing teeth		Water breaks	Getting the mail			Coloring
Sensory toys	Bath time						
	Bed time						

Using the PC TALK Manual

The PC TALK manual was designed to be used by professionals who support teachers, early interventionists, and caregivers in promoting language in communication development in home or childcare settings. It includes the tools and guidance needed to support those who care for and interact directly with young children in any context. In center-based early childhood education and intervention settings, this may include coaches, mentor teachers, or program supervisors or directors. In home-based services, this may include those who support families, or provide home-based intervention or education, such as early intervention providers, home visitors, parent educators, or professionals within early childhood education programs who share resources and supports with families, such as family engagement specialists.

While this manual is organized to be used by professionals working in early childhood or intervention programs, there are many sections of this manual that can be printed or copied and shared with families or teachers as handouts. These sections are included in the manual but may also be accessed individually at talk.ku.edu.

Within this manual, each of the PC TALK strategies is described along with information about why each

strategy promotes communication development and how it can be used with young children at all levels of development.

Each PC TALK strategy handout includes:

- A definition and description of each strategy
- Information about why the strategy is important
- Suggestions for how each strategy can be shared with parents, caregivers, and teachers
- Descriptions of how the strategy may be used by parents and teachers, including examples of strategy use with infants and toddlers at the pre-word stages of communication, and with young children at the single and multiple-word stages of communication.

Although each strategy is described individually, the strategies were designed to be used together, naturally, throughout daily activities and interactions. PC TALK includes a “toolkit” of resources that have all been designed to support caregivers in using the PC TALK strategies. The PC TALK website provides additional tools to help support the sustained use of the PC TALK strategies, and ensure that parents, caregivers, and teachers have the tools needed to support child communication development throughout the early years.

Tips For Using the PC TALK Manual

Throughout this manual, you will find cues that let you know which pages can be shared as handouts with caregivers. These are indicated by a yellow page footer, such as this.



All About Icons

- ✓ While strategies are effective in both center and home settings, a chalkboard with a bell indicates specific ways you can apply information to classrooms
- ✓ A house icon indicates resources more appropriate for home-based services
- ✓ A school building icon indicates resources specific to classrooms
- ✓ Most handouts will have both icons, since many handouts work for any caregiver, regardless of setting



Guidance is provided to assist caregivers in individualizing strategy use for children who have developmental delays or disabilities or who are dual language learners. Suggestions for these modifications can be found throughout the manual in light yellow text boxes, as demonstrated here.

PC TALK Tools for Supporting Strategy Use

In addition to the PC TALK Manual, additional tools can be downloaded from the PC TALK website: talk.ku.edu. Most materials are available in English and Spanish and can be printed in color or black and white.

Posters

The PC TALK Strategy Poster can be used to introduce caregivers to the PC TALK strategies. Available in English and Spanish, the poster shows a brief description of the PC TALK strategies and serves as a visual reminder to use the strategies. Consider printing in color on card stock, laminating, and, for classroom use, printing in a larger size. When laminated, a coach or provider can circle or star the strategies the caregiver wants to focus on with a dry erase marker.

These simple visual cues can prompt caregivers to use strategies more frequently. Encourage caregivers to think about where this sort of visual reminder would be most helpful. Potential locations include next to the classroom door, on a refrigerator, near a diaper changing station, or by other frequently used locations. Download the poster here: <https://talk.ku.edu/tools/posters/>



Videos

A brief video highlights each PC TALK strategy and includes a short description and example of the strategy. After "starting the conversation" about language and communication with the caregiver, consider using these brief strategy videos as a next step to show the caregiver what the strategy can look like. Access the strategy videos here: <https://talk.ku.edu/tools/videos/>



PC TALK Strategy Handouts

Handouts located throughout the manual are indicated by a yellow banner at the bottom of the manual page. Each PC TALK strategy has its own handout. These strategy handouts are available in English and Spanish and can be shared individually or as a packet.

The "Ways to" handouts are intended to introduce new strategies to families. You can use this handout when first discussing the strategy with a caregiver so they can easily see the basics of what the strategy is and how to use it. Caregivers may benefit if you look over the handout with them, pointing to specific parts of the handout as you are discussing the related content.

The **"Ideas for"** handouts that are specific to the developmental stages of children provide additional information. Each strategy has an "Ideas for" handout for caregivers using strategies with children who are not yet using words, and an **"Ideas for"** handout for caregivers using strategies with children who are using single- or multiple-words. Given that many caregivers work with children across developmental stages, and language and communication develop gradually, consider the caregiver's needs and interests when deciding which handouts to share, and when to share them. As you work with a caregiver, the caregiver may indicate they need new ideas, or the child has moved into a new stage of language use. These are opportunities to introduce the **"Ideas for"** handouts. Access individual handouts here: <https://talk.ku.edu/tools/strategy-handouts/>

Activity Cards

PC TALK Activity Cards provide examples of how the PC TALK strategies can be used within day-to-day routines, and reminders to use the strategies during typical daily activities. Each card contains examples of how one PC TALK strategy can be used in one type of daily routine. For every PC TALK strategy, activity cards show examples of strategy use in play, outdoor activities, reading, household routines, meals and snacks, outings, personal-care, and sleeping activities. There are also activity cards with examples of Environmental Arrangement. The activity cards can help describe how a strategy can be used in different ways, across different routines. Cards are available in English and Spanish.

You can access the activity cards on the PC TALK website two different ways at talk.ku.edu/tools/activity-cards/. You may search for and print individual cards by strategy, routine, language, or any combination of those search categories. You may also download one file with all of the cards in English and Spanish. By downloading one file containing all of the cards, you may print them double-sided, and English and Spanish versions will be available on both sides of one card.

Caregivers may post individual cards in a location that helps them remember to use the strategy. For example, a meal activity card could be placed near the refrigerator. A personal-care card could be placed on the bathroom mirror.

Promoting Communication Strategies
TALK
Tools for Advancing Language in Kids

Using Fill in the Blank with Children Who Use Words

Ideas for Using Fill in the Blank During Activities

Play

- Sing a familiar song to the child and pause. "Three little monkeys jumping on the..." Wait for the child to fill in the blank before continuing the song.
- When a child is placing puzzle pieces into a puzzle board, establish a phrase such as, "Hi pig, hi cow, hi horse," as the child places each piece. After a few pieces are completed, begin the phrase and pause to allow the child to finish. "Hi..."
- When handing blocks to a child, hold one back and wait for the child to request the block. Once the child requests the block, give the child the block and continue playing. If the child doesn't respond, start a phrase like, "I want..." If the child still doesn't respond, model "more blocks," and give the child the block.

Daily Routines

- When setting the table for lunch, pause before handing a plate to a child, waiting for a request for the plate. Or, the child can finish a sentence such as, "I want a..."
- If a child sees a cup of water and reaches for the cup, the adult may model, "May I please have some...?" to see if the child will say "water."
- Review rules with the children and allow them to fill in the blanks about how to behave. "In the hallway, we have calm..."

Books

- Pause during familiar stories to allow children to fill in the blank about what happens next. This should be used at meaningful points during familiar stories.
- Look at the cover of a book together and name the title of the book, pausing for key words you think the children know. If they don't fill in the blank, say the word for them.
- Pause when reading familiar books to give children the opportunity to participate. To help children know what to say, use books that repeat the same lines often. When reading "Brown Bear, Brown Bear," say, "I see a red bird looking at..." and allow the children to say "me."

Fill in the Blank
To help children who have difficulty saying words, combine actions with fill in the blank. This helps children with certain language issues get words out more easily. For each word, jump, wave your arms, or gesture with the child, then pause both your words and actions to encourage the child to fill in the blank.

Plan a delay in a predictable routine, song, or common phrase to encourage the child to communicate.

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TALK
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While playing outside, watch and listen so you can imitate and expand on what you hear your child say.

Imitate & Expand

Watch your child play, even if they are playing independently. Expand on what your child points to or signs. If they point to a bird, you can say...

Imitate a child's vocalizations or words back to the child, and expand by adding new information or words.

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Cuando cambiamos de una actividad a otra, comunique que sucederá después. Facilitará la transición y enseñará la secuencia de las palabras.

Ejemplos de frases en la transición

Organice el medio ambiente

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Caregiver Self-Checks

Self-checks are an important way for a caregiver to be reminded to use PC TALK Strategies and to self-evaluate their strategy use. By asking caregivers to reflect on and self-evaluate their strategy use, the caregiver is more likely to remember to use strategies and be more invested in using the strategies.

The “Planning” side of the self-check will help to begin your discussion with the caregiver to determine what the caregiver will focus on throughout the week.

The form is titled "PC TALK Strategies Caregiver Self Check Planner" and "My Plan". It includes a "SAMPLE SELF CHECK" section with checkboxes for various strategies like "Comment & Label", "Imitate & Expand", "Open-Ended Questions", "Provide Choices", "Positive Attention", "Fill-in-the-Blank", and "Follow Child's Lead". Below this, there are sections for "When would you like to talk more?" with checkboxes for "Play", "Eating", "Care Routines", "Books", "Outings", and "Other". The bottom section is for "Think about these questions when planning how you will talk more..." with prompts like "What is going well with the strategies I picked?", "How can I give more opportunities to talk?", and "What will remind me to use the strategies?".

The form is titled "Caregiver Self Check" and "Check strategies and circle routines you will focus on this week." It includes a "TALK" logo and a "Tools for Advancing Language in Kids" section. Below this, there are checkboxes for "Not used", "Rarely", "Sometimes", and "Often All of the time". The form also includes a "Caregiver: Provider:" section with a "Date:" field and a "Play Eating Care Books Outing Other" section. The main part of the form is a table with rows for "Comment & Label", "Imitate & Expand", "Open-Ended Questions", "Provide Choices", "Positive Attention", "Fill-in-the-Blank", and "Follow the Child's Lead". Each row has a column for each of the four frequency categories and a column for "Other".

Use responses from the planning side to mark which areas of the Self-Check the caregiver will complete. The first time you use the form, review both sides with the caregiver so they know how to use the form.

Encourage the caregiver to bring the self-check to your next session so you can discuss how things went together. If the caregiver forgets to bring the form or did not fill it out since your last session, you can fill out the form together by asking the caregiver to reflect on their use of the strategies and routines. Completed self-checks provide you with a place to start when discussing strategy use throughout the past week and help create a plan for how the caregiver will use the strategies in the coming week. Access self-checks here: <https://talk.ku.edu/tools/self-checks/>

Text Messaging Menu

Text messaging can be used to support caregivers use of the PC TALK strategies. Text messaging offers a quick, low-cost way to provide reminders to use the strategies throughout the week. The PC TALK Text Message Menu offers guidance for using text messaging to support caregiver PC TALK strategy use. It provides “ready to go” text messages that you can share “as is,” or edit to individualize them for the recipient. Download the Text Messaging menu here: <https://talk.ku.edu/providertools/coach-tools/>

Talk Around Town

Talk Around Town is a mobile app for Android and iOS that delivers suggestions to families for engaging and talking with young children during community outings, such as grocery shopping, the playing at the park, or visiting the library. Tips for using language promoting strategies during outings and errands are delivered directly to caregivers’ mobile phones, in the locations where they choose to receive tips. Talk Around Town also includes a web-based data dashboard where providers can review parent-reported data about outings and PC TALK strategy use.

PC-Obs System

The Promoting Communication Strategies Observation System (PC-Obs) is a mobile app that is used to document PC TALK strategy use by caregivers and teachers during naturalistic observations. PC-Obs is used to collect frequency data on adult strategy use and child communication during naturalistic daily activities in home and child care settings. These data can be used to monitor intervention delivery, inform practice, and monitor progress over time. PC-Obs captures a real-time frequency sample of parent-child interaction. Time intervals may be selected as desired by research team, but observation length is typically 15-min. Observations are typically conducted by early childhood professionals (e.g., home visitors, early intervention providers, classroom coaches) every 2 to 3 months. The PC-Obs app is available for Android on the Google Play Store, and for iOS on the Apple Store. Technical and user manual can be found here: <https://talk.ku.edu/data-tools-2/pcobs/>

The online PC-Obs data dashboard generates graphs and tables that show adult strategy use, other adult talk, negative adult talk, and child communication. When PC-Obs is used together with the PC TALK strategies, the graphs are shared with caregivers to provide data-based feedback about their use of the strategies and child communication during naturalistic observations. Access the PC-Obs dashboard here: <https://pcobs.ku.edu/>



The Basics of PC TALK Sessions

PC TALK materials and components are intended to be flexible and easily adjusted to meet the needs of individual caregivers and incorporate into existing home visiting and classroom curricula. PC TALK designed to fit within existing practices, and can be shared with caregivers in the following

- 1 Introduce the PC TALK Strategies to the caregiver.**
Tools you can use: PC TALK Strategies Overview Video, Poster
- 2 Decide what strategy to focus on first.**
Tools you can use: PC TALK Manual, PC-Obs data, Self-check
- 3 Introduce the first strategy.**
Tools you can use: Starting the Conversation, Strategy Video, "Ways To" Handouts

After you have introduced PC TALK and started learning about specific strategies, your sessions can follow a cyclical process that involves reviewing data to plan next steps together with the caregiver.



Supporting Caregivers in Using PC TALK

The PC TALK intervention was designed so that coaches and providers who support caregivers can incorporate the PC TALK strategies and resources into ongoing learning and professional development. While the PC TALK intervention and its suite of tools have been designed to be flexible in how they are shared, we offer some recommendations about how to get started, and how to continue to support caregivers in using the strategies as children's language and communication grow.

For early childhood professionals delivering home-based services such as early intervention or home visiting, the approach to sharing the PC TALK strategies with families will be influenced by the individual needs of families and children, how PC TALK aligns with other family goals, and the services being delivered. If you are an intervention coach or supervisor supporting early childhood educators in center-based care programs, guidance is provided on how you can deliver professional development and coaching that builds the capacity of teachers and care providers to use PC TALK.

While we provide guidance here on how to support caregivers in using PC TALK, we encourage you to use the PC TALK tools in ways that align with your existing curricula, as well as your existing professional development. You might think of PC TALK as a "tool box" of resources that can be used to integrate PC TALK with existing curricula, interventions, and services. PC TALK can be integrated with your program's professional development efforts to support language and communication development for young children.

Introducing PC TALK to Caregivers

There are several PC TALK tools that can help you share the strategies with caregivers. PC TALK resources support strategy use across daily routines, and as children's language and communication grows. Below, you will find guidance on how to introduce and support

continued PC TALK use over time. For an overview of the ways you can introduce PC TALK to families, see [Getting Started with PC TALK](#).

Here, we outline the strategies providers, home visitors, and coaches can use when sharing PC TALK with families or teachers. These strategies are included on the PC TALK Intervention Delivery Checklist, which is used to document PC TALK intervention delivery. The Intervention Delivery Checklist Instructions can be found here: [Intervention Delivery Checklist Instructions](#)

Discuss Background and Rationale

For most caregivers, we recommend beginning with an introduction to child language and communication development and the role that adult communication and interaction plays in child language development. This can be brief or it can be more involved. It is important to lay a foundation for PC TALK by providing the "why" for caregivers. This might include sharing information about some of the following topics:

- How does language and communication begin for young children?
- How does language and communication progress from infancy to toddlerhood to preschool?
- What role do adult caregivers play in child language and communication development?
- Why is it important to provide opportunities to experience and engage in language and communication for young children?

Introduce and Review PC Strategies

When your role is aimed at supporting families, consider introducing just one or two strategies at a time, and use examples from one or two routines. Starting gradually can ensure parents are successful in using the PC strategies naturally

in their typical daily activities. This approach can help build caregiver capacity over time to effectively use all the strategies throughout daily routines. If your role is supporting teachers, you may have the opportunity to share all the strategies across one or two professional development sessions and then provide support or coaching on an ongoing basis.

Whether you introduce just one strategy at a time or all the strategies all at once, the strategy handouts provide caregivers with an introduction to each strategy. It is important to first name and describe the strategy, and provide information of how it promotes language and communication. The manual handouts provide this information, as well as specific, real-life examples for how the strategy can be used. Using the examples in the manual, in addition to discussing concrete examples that are relevant for the caregiver can help caregivers see how they can incorporate the strategy into their interactions and activities. The PC TALK Strategy Handouts can be found here in the PC TALK manual as well as the PC TALK website, and can be shared as handouts. The Activity Cards also provide strategy examples in typical daily routines.

Plan for PC Strategy Use in Daily Routines

Through a discussion with the caregiver, identify daily routines in which the caregiver will practice the strategies. It may be important to first describe what “daily routines” are and the importance of using the PC strategies across different routines throughout the day to encourage child communication. For example, during a session in which you have discussed Commenting and Labeling, ask about what daily activities a caregiver might choose to begin using that strategy. Help caregivers consider the activities where children participate, such as book reading time or mealtime. Then, once you have selected a strategy and routine, provide specific examples of strategy use by sharing the Activity Card that matches up with those strategies and routines. Additionally, the Self-Check can be used when planning how the care provider can practice strategies after your session. By making notes on

the Self-Check (see example) with a highlighter or pen, you have created a written “reminder” as well as a way for care providers to reflect upon and document strategy use.

Plan to Individualize PC Strategy Use

In both home and center settings, it is crucial to support caregivers in using the strategies in ways that are appropriate for the child or children in their care. PC TALK was designed for all care providers and all children, and the tools can help to individualize the strategies for all children. The PC TALK Manual provides handouts for caregivers that outline each strategy. Examples that are specific to either children who are using sounds and gestures, or children who are using words and multiple word utterances using the PC TALK Strategy Handouts.

The PC strategies can be used with children who have disabilities or delays as well as typically developing children. Most caregiver resources are also available in Spanish. The resources were designed to be used in a flexible manner, and caregivers are encouraged to use the PC strategies in new ways as children’s language and communication grows.

Demonstrate PC Strategies Use

One way to support caregivers in understanding and using the PC strategies is to model or demonstrate how they can be used with children. Sometimes observing another person using a strategy can help parents understand how they can use the strategy. This might involve modeling the use of a strategy, or strategies, during interactions with a child so that caregivers can observe another adult using the strategy. It may also result in the caregiver having the opportunity to see the child response.

Encourage Caregiver Reflection

After an initial introduction to the PC strategies, and caregivers have the opportunity to use the strategies outside of your meetings, it will be important to ask caregivers open-ended questions to encourage them to reflect on their

use of the strategies. Prompt caregivers to reflect by asking caregivers about the strategies they used, how they fit within daily routines, and how the child responded. This can be an effective way to identify challenges, as well as provide encouragement and feedback to support caregivers in continuing to use the strategies throughout their day and week. Coaches or providers might ask, “How did your use of the PC strategies go last week?” “What happened when you tried the PC strategies during bedtime?” or “What did you observe about the child’s communication?”

Review Self-Check Responses

The Self-Check is a planning tool that can be used as a reminder that can be left with caregivers regarding the strategies and routines that they chose to work on. It is also a self-monitoring tool. Caregivers can use it to document the strategies they use, and the routines where they use the strategies. When caregivers share their completed Self-Check with you, this can provide you with a starting point for discussion and feedback, and as a tool for planning continued strategy use. We encourage you to use a new Self-Check at each session so that it can be used to summarize caregivers’ PC TALK plans after your visit, and as a reminder and self-monitoring tool throughout the week.

Share and Discuss PC-Obs graph

The PC-Obs graphs show the frequency of parent communication strategy use along with child communication as measured by the PC-Obs data collection tool. The graphs also show how adult strategy use and child communication are related – when adults use the strategies more frequently, children often communicate more, too. When the PC-Obs data graphs are shared with caregivers, along with positive and constructive feedback, they can be a powerful tool in supporting caregivers in their use of the strategies. The graphs can be accessed on the PC TALK PC-Obs online data dashboard, when you become a certified PC-Obs observer.

Provide Positive and Constructive Feedback

After caregivers have had the opportunity to try the strategies with young children, and caregivers have reflected, reported on their strategy use, or you have discussed self-checks or PC-Obs graphs, provide positive and constructive feedback to caregivers that supports their continued strategy use. Positive feedback can include encouragement and supportive comments that highlight effort, strengths, and successes in using the strategies. Constructive feedback includes statements that aimed at prompting caregivers to increase their efforts to use the PC strategies, support improvements in the way they are using them, or offer corrections when needed. We encourage you to use both positive and constructive feedback to encourage caregivers’ efforts to use the PC strategies effectively.

Problem-Solve Challenges

During each PC TALK session, it is important for providers and caregivers to talk through any challenges that occur in using the PC TALK strategies. Providers should be attuned to challenges, and actively inquire about caregivers’ progress in using the strategies with young children. It is crucial that providers help overcome barriers to using the PC TALK strategies and tools. Providers can learn about the challenges caregivers are experiencing by observing, asking, and providing opportunities for caregivers to share their experiences.

Plan for Sharing PC strategies with Others

In order to create a rich learning environment for all children, it is important to consider including all of the adult caregivers when sharing PC TALK strategies. When providers meet with one adult in the home, it may be helpful to talk about how the PC TALK strategies can be shared with other caregivers in the child’s life, such as a co-parent, grandparent, or babysitter. In child care centers, it is important that the whole teaching team implement the PC TALK strategies throughout the day and across activities. Talk about ways this can be accomplished. This may be by offering

some materials that can be shared, such as the PC TALK Manual Handouts, the Poster, or the Activity Cards. Providers can point out that the Manual Handouts offer more information to share with providers about how and why the PC TALK strategies can work to make the child's language environment rich and engaging.

Discuss Text Messaging

In the course of sharing PC TALK with caregivers, providers may offer Text Messaging as an additional strategy for sharing the PC TALK strategies and suggestions for how they can be used in daily activities with young children. Text messaging is a low-cost, time-efficient strategy for sharing additional information with caregivers about the PC TALK strategies, and providing timely prompts throughout the week to remember to use the strategies with young children in their daily routines and activities. Refer to the Text Messaging Menu for more information on this component of PC TALK. Access the Text Message Menu here: [Text Message Menu](#)

Discuss Talk Around Town

Talk Around Town is a mobile app that families can use while out in the community with their young child. Once parents download the app, they can then enter the locations in their community where they visit with their child on a regular basis. For instance, families can enter their grocery store, favorite restaurant, and local park or library into the app, just like they would enter it into an online mapping program. Once that location is saved, families receive brief, location-specific messages on their smartphone that describe how they can use language-promoting strategies as they go about their community outings.

Promoting Communication Strategies



Tools for Advancing Language in Kids

PC TALK Strategy Handouts

Each of the PC TALK Strategy Handouts include a definition and description of each strategy, suggestions for how each strategy can be shared with parents, caregivers, and teachers, and descriptions of how adults might use the strategy with infants and young children.

Examples are provided for children at the pre-word stages of communication, and children at the single and multiple-word stages of communication. Although each strategy is described individually, the strategies were designed to be used together, naturally, throughout daily activities and interactions to provide rich and engaging language learning opportunities throughout the day.

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Arranging the Environment

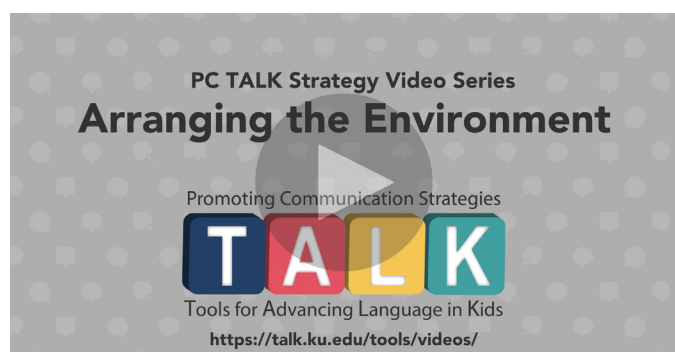
What is it?

Arranging the environment refers to the way we set up the *physical* and *social* environments, and the way we use *daily routines, activities, and transitions* to support interaction and communication between children and adults.

Routines are regularly occurring, familiar activities a young child experiences during a day.

Transitions are the times of change that occur in a child's day, such as when children move from one experience to another – for example, from indoor play to outdoor play, or from nap to snack.

Schedules can be thought of as predictable sequences of activities and transitions that make up a child's day.



Why is it important?

Arranging the **physical** environment:

- helps facilitate learning and social interactions, such as back-and-forth communications;
- encourages children to initiate communication about things they need, want, or find interesting;
- makes it easier for children to see, feel, and find things to talk about.

Arranging the **social** environment:

- gives children opportunities to practice communication by building in time for play and social interaction and limiting screen time;
- prevents overly loud, busy, or disorganized environments that make it difficult for adults and children to have warm, engaging interactions and conversations.

Predictable schedules & routines help children know what to expect and be comfortable and confident as they practice communication.

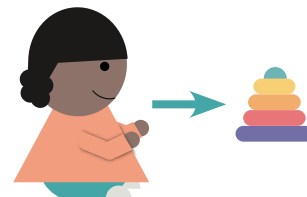
Transitions can be challenging for children. Explaining what is next or using a familiar song or game can help children move more easily from one activity to another and provide opportunities to practice communication.



Arranging the Physical Environment

Whether you are a parent or caregiver at home or a childcare provider at a center, arranging the areas where children play and go about their daily activities can help support growth in children's communication.

Display toys and materials at **children's eye level**. They may then choose toys of interest to them and be more likely to talk about these preferred toys.



Place some preferred toys **out of reach**, but **within view**, so that children communicate their requests for toys. Watch for children looking, pointing to, or talking about these toys, and respond to their requests.



Center Tips

- ✓ Arrange play areas, such as block building, books, art, or dress up, in ways that encourage play and interaction
- ✓ Partially set up a play area, such as a dress up or play house area, to give children a "starter" activity to expand and talk about
- ✓ Label shelves and containers with pictures of the materials so children know where materials belong to help promote communication and early literacy, as well as independence

Keep toys and books **organized** using shelves, bins, baskets, or boxes that children can access. This helps children find what they want.

Display pictures of children, family members, and caregivers on the wall at children's eye level to promote interest and communication.

Rotate toys so that children have opportunities to play with a variety of toys. Organize bins of toys that you can bring out or put away every few weeks. Even putting 1 or 2 toys away for a little while and then rotating them out with other toys can keep play interesting.

Keep household items that children should not have access to, such as breakables, **out of reach**. This reduces the need to redirect the child, or say "no."

Environment

Organize and plan
to promote
communication &
interaction





Arranging the Social Environment

Adults can support adult and child interactions and communication throughout the day. Both at home and at childcare, support communication and relationship building by building opportunities for communication into the social environment.

Plan activities that encourage children to interact and play together. Activities such as building blocks and musical instruments, encourage children to engage in social interactions and play.

Modify activities you typically engage in to promote social interaction. Even when children are too young to engage in cooperative play, you can start to build in opportunities to observe and practice communication.

Listen and respond to children's attempts to communicate so you can encourage them to talk. During your pauses, watch and listen for child attempts to communicate – this might include words and sounds, but also looks, reaching, or kicking feet to show excitement.

Position yourself and young children so you are facing each other and you are at the child's eye level, whenever possible.

Create fun pairings of sounds or phrases with specific actions so they become **predictable**. If a child puts a hat on your head, let the hat fall off and say, "Off." If a toddler is cleaning up by putting farm animals into a box, say "Good night horse, good night cow," etc. Repeat the routine several times to allow the child to predict and imitate the phrase.

Use community outings to provide new opportunities for communication. Show children how you greet the cashier in a store. Look for an opportunity to interact with the librarian, or with other children at the park, and **model** positive communication and interaction.



Center Tips

Consider ways you can encourage children to notice and observe others

- ✓ Position infants and non-mobile children so they can observe and interact with one another
- ✓ During book or circle times, ensure infants can observe older infants and toddlers and see how they are communicating
- ✓ Greet friends, using their name, as they join circle time in the classroom
- ✓ When planning activities, build in opportunities for communication and interactions
- ✓ Plan ways to introduce new vocabulary and provide opportunities for back-and-forth interactions between peers, as well as adults and





Environment: Schedules & Routines

Consistent and familiar activities that happen around the same time and in a similar way each day provide a sense of security and predictability to young children. They help build trust so children can experience and practice communication throughout their day and in a variety of activities.

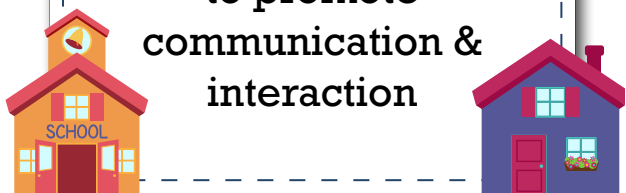
Schedules

- Use the PC Strategies to talk about the series of activities that will take place throughout the day. Refer to the daily schedule often. "First we will read books, and then we will have a snack."
- Refer to things that happened in the past as you talk about the daily schedule. "Remember, yesterday we went outside after naptime."

To help children who are learning the primary language of your classroom or children who do not understand many words, create a visual schedule with pictures. For younger children, or for children just learning about schedules, you can have a two-picture schedule, showing what is happening now and what is happening next.

Environment

Organize and plan
to promote
communication &
interaction



Center Tips

- ✓ Plan a general schedule that all caregivers are aware of and follow
- ✓ Build flexibility into the schedule to respond to individual child needs
- ✓ Create familiar routines all caregivers in the room can follow
- ✓ Talk about the activities of the day and what is happening next with the children

Routines

- Establish familiar routines to help children anticipate, prepare for, and talk about upcoming activities. For example, plan a naptime routine around "books, cuddles, and bed." The routine may include the use of some clearly marked opener/closer, such as a song.
- Build in routines throughout the day that are familiar and predictable, even if your day does not follow its usual schedule.
- Introduce surprises during routine care activities such as diapering and dressing. Place clothing items in silly or unexpected places, such as placing a mitten on the child's foot, or a shoe on the child's hand. Ask, "Is this where we put the mitten?" This is likely to draw comments from the child and keep the child interested in the activity.



Environment: Tips for Smoother Transitions

Transitions can be challenging for children. Explaining what is next or using a familiar song or game can help children move more easily from one activity to another and provide opportunities to practice communication.

Give a warning when a transition is about to happen. “In two minutes we are going to clean up. Then, we will have lunch.” Children will be better prepared to stop their activity, clean up, and move on to the next activity.

Use a visual to show children what is next or what they should be doing. Hold up a cup if it is time to transition to lunch. Show them a bottle of soap or a picture of hand washing if they are getting ready to wash hands.



Talk about the positive behaviors you see during transition. “Daniel is waiting at the door.” “Mel knows just where to go for diaper change.”

Reduce “wait time” during transitions by being prepared and announcing the transition at the right time. If children must wait, provide an activity to do while waiting. Look at books, encourage children to talk about what they want to do when they go outside, or involve them in transition activities, such as cleanup or putting on shoes.

Sing familiar songs during transitions between activities. Use these songs to teach language. For example, “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes” or the “Clean Up” song can become a familiar “cue,” but also

provide children opportunities to engage in communication with adults and peers.



Environment

Organize and plan
to promote
communication &
interaction



Some children may need extra time to transition due to physical or social-emotional needs. Think about how other caregivers or children can help. Have a plan that everyone is aware of.

Environment: Books

Build a love of reading from an early age by being strategic about how you place and use books.

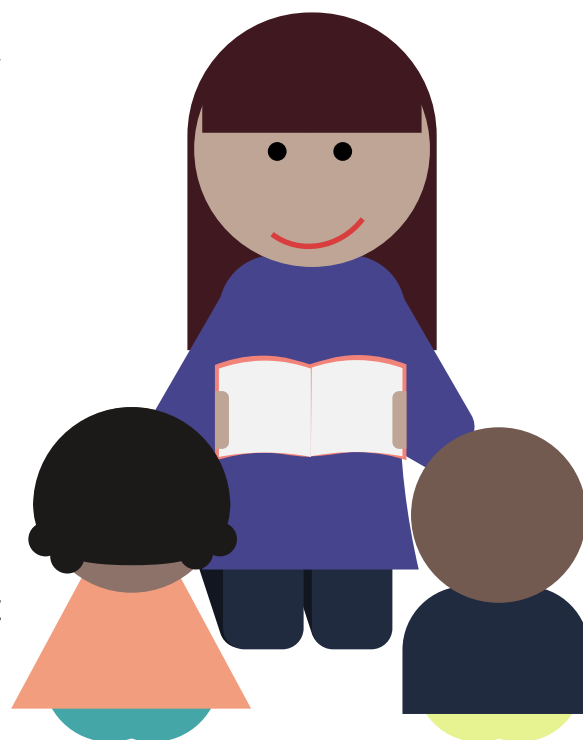
Display books so children can access them independently and request favorites.

Create a cozy, quiet book reading area to encourage time with books. Add pillows, blankets, and stuffed animals to make it a cozy, inviting area.

Have books available for children to look at on their own throughout the day. Place books on low shelves that children can reach independently.

Let infants play with books, chew on them, or bang them.

Include a variety of books, with some that are repetitive and predictable (e.g., "Brown Bear, Brown Bear"). When children learn what to expect next, they may be more likely to participate in book activities.



Environment

Organize and plan
to promote
communication &
interaction



Plan to have book time every day.

Structure book time so it is a time to practice communication. Give choices about the books you will look at. Ask open-ended questions about the characters, the story, and the pictures. Label what you see in the pictures. Encourage discussion and turn-taking. Book time should be engaging, and not just "listening" time.



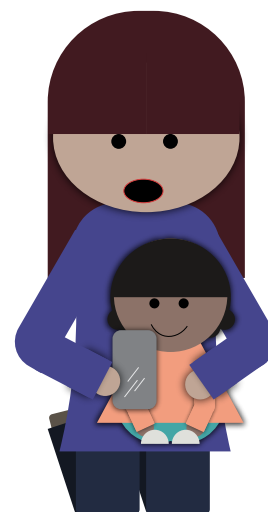
Environment: Technology Tips

Technology is everywhere, but pediatric professionals encourage us to limit screen time for young children. If you have questions about technology and your child, your pediatrician is there to answer your questions. Here are some ideas to help you navigate technology and young children.

If screens are used, use them in a way that **promotes engagement** and communication.

Use screens **together** with children, rather than leave children alone with screens.

Talk about the shows your child watches, or the games they are playing, and use these opportunities to encourage communication.



Only use apps or videos that are **age appropriate**, and use them as learning opportunities – engage with your child, talk about what you see, and ask questions.

Turn off the television, turn music down, and put electronics away during book time and throughout the day. This will help to reduce distraction and help adults and children focus on each other, and on communication.



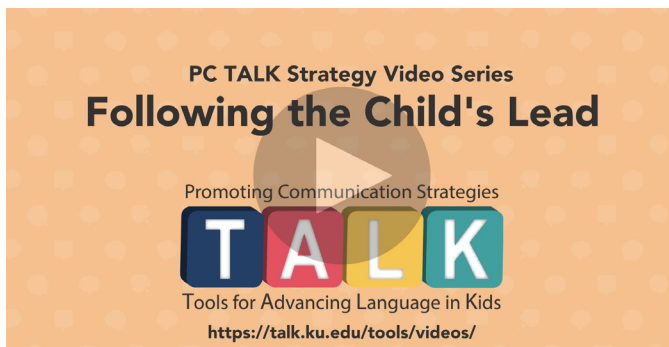
Use technology such as tablets, phones, and computers **infrequently**. When you do use them with young children, do so in ways that encourage interaction and communication between adults and children. Play age-appropriate games with your child and talk about the game as you play together. Look at family pictures and talk about who you see.

Follow the Child's Lead

What is it?

Following the child's lead involves:

- *Noticing* what a child is interested in, looking at, playing with, or talking about and using that interest to provide opportunities for communication
- *Engaging* in child-directed interactions and activities
- *Being responsive* to infants and young children by observing, listening, and interacting when children communicate using gestures, vocalizations, or words



Why is it important?

It is easier for children to learn names for things they are already interested in and paying attention to.

Children are more likely to want to communicate and engage in longer "back and forth" conversations about things they are interested in.

When adults are responsive, young children are more likely to initiate communication, and eventually learn how to be more responsive to others.

More interactions with adults who are following the child's lead means more opportunities for communication.

Getting Started

Young children are more likely to attend to and learn from caregivers who **notice** what children are interested in, and are able to **join** in with the child's activities in a **responsive** way. This is what we call "Following the Child's Lead." Following the child's lead should be used with all of the promoting communication strategies. Those strategies will be most effective when the caregiver is attending to and being responsive to the child's interests and activities.



Ways to Follow the Child's Lead



First, **observe** and **notice** what the child is interested in – what they are looking at, playing with, or talking about.

Use the child's **current interest** as the starting point for communication.

You like watching the cars drive by!

Get down onto the **child's level** so you can make eye contact. Using a friendly, engaging voice, listen to and respond to the child.

Follow a child's lead by using a variety of PC TALK strategies to **talk about** a child's toys or activities.

Let a **child direct** your play together. Ask the child about what they are doing and how you should play. For example, when painting, ask, "What should we paint here?"

Follow Child's Lead

Notice and talk about
child's interests,
activities, & materials



When a child is **not engaged** in an activity, present them with a couple choices to gain their interest. Base those choices on activities in which the child has shown interest in the past. Then, follow the child's lead in the chosen activity.



Following the Child's Lead with Children Who Use Gestures & Sounds

Ideas for Following the Child's Lead During Activities



Play

- If a child is playing with a ball, find another ball and play in a similar way, or initiate rolling the ball back and forth. Describe the child's actions, how the ball bounces high, rolls so far, or how the child is catching the ball.
- Allow children to direct your play activities together. If a child is lining up the blocks to make a road, join in the activity and build the road together. Try to avoid directing the child to build the road a certain way, or to build something else. Ask open-ended questions about where the road might be going, or how to build onto the road.
- If a child is coloring or painting dots, allow the child to continue doing this rather than directing the child to paint a picture.



Daily Routines

- Observe and talk about the foods children are eating at snack or lunch time. *"Krystal is eating crackers." "What are you eating now, Dion?"* While handing out cups, ask, *"What color is your cup, Sam?"*
- While changing diapers or dressing, notice where children are looking and talk about the focus of their attention. *"What do you see up there?"* If the child is watching you, comment on what you are doing. *"We are putting on your shirt. Here is your arm!" "Now I am going to wash my hands."*
- During clean-up time, listen to what children say and respond by adding more information. If a child says, *"doggy,"* you might say, *"Yes, we're picking up the dogs and putting them away."*



Books

- When a child is looking at books, join in and offer to read the book with them. If the child wants to look at the pictures and turn the pages, follow the child's lead and name or ask open-ended questions about what you see in the pictures.
- If a child is not currently engaged in an activity, pick out two books the child might enjoy and ask, *"Which book would you like to read?"*
- If a child turns pages while reading a story, follow the child's lead and talk about the page they turned to.

Help children with limited movement point at pictures or turn pages with you. Observe the child to see where the child is looking and respond by describing what they see.

Follow Child's Lead

Notice and talk about child's interests, activities, & materials





Following the Child's Lead with Children Who Use Words

Ideas for Following the Child's Lead During Activities

Play

- While playing, a child places a doll in a bed. Describe the child's activity. *"Baby is sleeping. 'Night, baby."* Place another doll in the bed. Wait for the child to respond.
- A child watches a large truck and people working outside the window. Respond by sitting next to the child and saying, *"Oh, that's a big truck. What are they doing out there?"* This can start a conversation about the activities of the workers and their trucks.
- While playing outside, watch and describe the children's movements and actions. *"You're climbing up the ladder, and sliding down the slide."* *"You are pushing the shopping cart. What are you shopping for?"*
- Notice what the child is coloring and describe the colors, the shapes, and even the scribbles. Ask *"What should I draw?"* and draw what the child asks you to draw.

Daily Routines

- While preparing for naptime, let children help get ready and comment on their sheets or blankets. *"You have sheets with bears."* *"That is a pretty blanket."*
- During meals, talk about the foods everyone is eating. *"What are we having today?"* *"I like apples. Where do apples grow?"* Wait for children to respond, and then continue talking about the foods they are eating.
- During daily routines such as diapering, dressing, or nap, notice if the child is awake and excited, or quiet and sleepy. Follow their lead and adjust your energy level and tone to theirs and to the activity as you talk about your activities or about the day.

Books

- When a child points to pictures in a book, observe and respond by asking open-ended questions. *"What are they doing?"* *"Who is that?"* *"Where are they going?"* or *"Why did they do that?"* This can open up a conversation about what they see in the book.
- During circle time, allow children to choose books to read together. Let different children make their choices each day as everyone is getting ready to sit down.
- Think back on the activities of the day when choosing books. If children played restaurant in the morning, offer the choice of a book about foods or eating.
- As you look at books together, observe where children are looking or the pages they turn to most often. Offer more detailed descriptions for those parts of the book.

Follow Child's Lead

Notice and talk about
child's interests,
activities, & materials



Comment & Label

What is it?

Commenting and **labeling** expands child vocabulary by using specific, descriptive language to describe the child's interests or actions.

Commenting includes describing or narrating the actions in which a child is involved.

Labeling includes naming the child's toys, materials, or activities.



Why is it important?

Commenting and **labeling** gives children opportunities to learn the correct labels for their actions and for objects, an important early step to school readiness.

When children hear comments or labels about things they are interested in or playing with, they are more likely to remember the names of those items or activities.

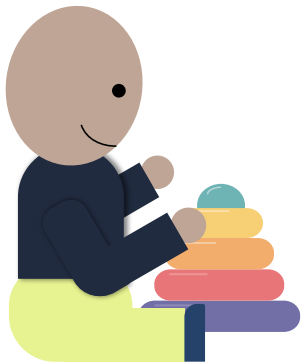
As children explore their world, they need words to talk about what they see, touch, taste, smell, and hear. Commenting and labeling provides children with words to describe their experiences and feelings.

Getting Started

*Have you ever noticed babies understand words long before they begin talking? What are some of the first words you noticed your child understanding? Babies learn words like mama or dada first, because the word is important to them, and they hear it often. Today, we're going to talk about a strategy that uses a child's ability to attend to things they are interested in to **build their vocabulary**:
Commenting and Labeling.*



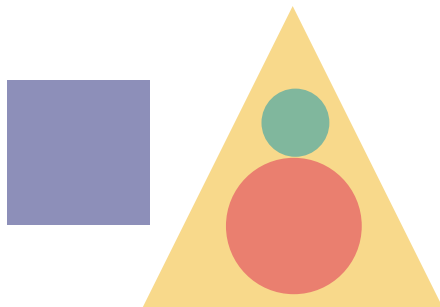
Ways to Comment & Label



Name the child's toys or materials as they are playing with them.

You're playing with the stacking rings!

Describe the child's actions as they are doing them or as you are helping the child to do them. Be the "**narrator**" for children's actions.



Label colors, shapes, sizes, or other descriptors - in/out, big/small, up/down, open/closed, fast/slow, warm/cold, on top/under, loud/quiet.

Comment & Label

Describe, name, or talk about a child's actions, activities, toys, or materials.



Talk about what you are doing or what children are doing during daily routines, such as diapering, meals, or clean-up.





Commenting & Labeling with Children Who Use Gestures & Sounds

Ideas for Describing, Naming, and Talking During Activities



Play

- When a child is playing ball, say, *"You're playing ball"* or *"You rolled the ball far."*
- During play time, notice what children are doing and say one thing about it. *"You are crawling!" "Up!" "You're cooking." "Rocking the baby."*
- When an infant is playing with an object while they are in a bouncy seat, comment about what they are playing with. *"You have the bunny."*
- When an infant is positioned near a window, comment on what they might see outside the window. *"I see a bird!"*



Daily Routines

- While changing diapers, name the child's body parts as you point or touch them. *"Toes," "Knees," or "Your tummy."*
- While diapering or changing clothes, describe what you are doing. *"I'm taking your diaper off." "Here's a clean diaper." "Let's clean up, then we can go play."*
- During bottle feeding, snack, or mealtime, name the foods. *"Yummy apples." "Spoon." "You are so hungry. Time for a bottle." "Push the switch to say 'more.'"*
- Talk about the pictures on children's clothing. *"You have Spiderman on your shoes!" "Katie has red flowers on her shirt."*



Books

- A child may not listen to an entire story, but might be more interested in talking about the pictures. Describe what people in the story are doing or how they look. *"The boys and girls are playing ball." "That's so silly. The dog is wearing a hat!"*
- While looking at books together, comment on the story or comment about the pictures. *"The bird is singing. He must be happy."*
- Name what the child is looking at or pointing to in the book. You can help the child point if they aren't pointing yet.
- Make up stories to go with picture books. When looking at a book with pictures of people, talk about who the people are, what they are doing, or how they feel.

Comment & Label

Describe, name, or talk about a child's actions, activities, toys, or materials.





Commenting & Labeling with Children Who Use Words

Ideas for Describing, Naming, and Talking During Activities



Play

- While playing with sand, notice how children are playing and using the sand tools, and describe the activities that you see. *"You're pouring the sand in the bowl." "The sand feels cool on my fingers."*
- During play, comment on children's activities and describe what you are doing together. *"You're filling up the bucket!" "We're making music on the drum!"*
- During finger painting, label colors and describe what you see. *"Alex is using a lot of green." "That's a big tree." "You're mixing all the colors together."*
- While outside, describe children's actions. *"You're climbing so high." "You run so fast!"*



Daily Routines

- During transitions, such as going from lunch to nap, describe what children are doing. *"Tyler is all ready for nap." "Maria put all her toys away."*
- Before and during meals, name the foods children will be eating, comment on children's interests, and describe food as they eat. *"We're having noodles and apples." "Sierra finished her apples." "Rabbits like to eat carrots, too."*
- During clean up, comment on what children are doing. *"Thank you for putting all the animals in the box." "Devin, you picked up all the puzzle pieces."*
- While dressing or diapering, name body parts. Point to a child's knees and say, *"Here are your knees."* If a child points to a body part, label it. *"You found your toes."*



Books

- When looking at books, describe what is going on in the story. Describe the actions of the characters or what the pictures show.
- Label the colors, shapes, and sizes you find in books. Look for opportunities to compare objects. *"That's a yellow sun." "That house is big and the mouse is so small."*
- As you look at books together, label the characters' actions or feelings or name objects you see in pictures. *"The cat is sleeping on a bed." "She looks happy!" "There's the dump truck."*

Comment & Label

Describe, name, or talk about a child's actions, activities, toys, or materials.



Imitate & Expand

What is it?

Imitating and **expanding** involves modeling two important conversational skills: listening and responding in a way that reflects understanding.

Imitating is *repeating* a child's sounds or words back to the child.

Expanding is both imitating the child and *adding new information*.



Why is it important?

Imitating child vocalizations and words shows the child they were *heard and understood*.

Expanding by adding new words helps the child build vocabulary for concepts they already know.

Children are more likely to communicate in the future when caregivers are responsive to their communication.

If a child's words are unclear, imitating allows the child to hear the correct form of communication. For example, if a child says, "I goed there," the caregiver can say "I went there."

Getting Started

*Having conversations takes many different skills. We have to first watch and listen, and then use those skills to respond in a way that shows others we **hear and understand** them.*

The strategy we are going to focus on today - Imitating and Expanding - will help children develop these skills.



Ways to Imitate & Expand

Imitate sounds

Imitate the child's sounds. Sometimes, a child will respond to your imitation with another sound. You can imitate the sound a second time and a third time, promoting reciprocal, or "back-and-forth," interactions. In this way, children practice skills they will need for having conversations.

Child

Ahhhhh

Caregiver

Ahhhhh

Ah-boo!

Ah-boo!

Model back words

When a child comes close to saying words, imitate the child using the correct word.

Ba ba

Bottle. Bottle, please!

Imitate, then expand to add more

Expand on what a child says by imitating the general idea the child expressed, and then add more to that communication.

Car

That car is going fast!

Teach new names for objects

There are many words that mean the same thing: puppy, dog; kitty, cat; cup, glass. Teach children different names for objects.

My tummy.

Yes, that's your stomach.

Imitate & Expand

Imitate a child's vocalizations or words back to the child, and expand by adding new information or words.



Sometimes a child tries to say a word, but it's not quite right. Rather than repeating back exactly what the child says, say the correct form of the word. Try not to tell the child they said the word wrong. As they grow, they will be more able to say words correctly.

Lellow.

Yes, yellow!



Imitating & Expanding with Children Who Use Gestures & Sounds

Ideas for Repeating Back & Adding New Information During Activities



Play

- Imitate the sounds children make while playing so the child is more likely to make more sounds. As long as the child is making sounds, keep imitating those sounds.
Child: "Ma ma ma."
Caregiver: (while smiling and making eye contact) "Ma ma ma."
- Give ideas while playing dolls and listen and respond when a child makes sounds.
Caregiver: "Baby is going to sleep."
Child: "Ba."
Caregiver: "Yes, baby is going to sleep."
- Finger paint together and imitate by saying the colors the child points to.
Child: (points to green)
Caregiver: "You want green paint."



Daily Routines

- Talk about what is happening during diaper change. Listen and respond to the child.
Caregiver: "It's time to change your diaper."
Child: "Dah"
Caregiver: "Yes, time to change your diaper."
- Watch for children to reach for or point at feeding items. Model how to ask for things.
Child: (reaches for bottle)
Caregiver: (while giving child bottle) "Milk, please."
- While playing outside, watch for children to sign words. Imitate and expand with signs.
Child: (claps hands together in an attempt to sign "ball")
Caregiver: (signs) "Ball, that's a red ball."



Books

- Be responsive when a child comes to you with a book.
Child: (holding book) "buh."
Caregiver: "Book. You want to read this book about dogs." (reads with child)
- While looking at books, respond when children point to pictures by imitating and providing new information.
Child: (points to a dog) "Woo woo."
Caregiver: "Woof woof. That's what the dog says."
- Be responsive when a child is ready to move on to the next page of a book.
Child: "Mah" (tries to turn page)
Caregiver: "More - Let's see what's next." (turns page)

Imitate & Expand

Imitate a child's vocalizations or words back to the child, and expand by adding new information or words.





Imitating & Expanding with Children Who Use Words

Ideas for Repeating Back & Adding New Information During Activities

Play

- Play puzzles together and expand when a child names a puzzle piece.
Child: "Fire truck."
Caregiver: "Yes, that's a red fire truck. Do you see the ladder on the side?"
- Build a block tower together and teach the child new words for what you are building.
Child: "I build tower."
Caregiver: "Yes, you're building a very tall tower. It's a skyscraper."
- Play kitchen together and look for ways to imitate and expand on sharing.
Child: "Mine."
Caregiver: "Mine – you want a plate, too. Let's find a plate for you."

Daily Routines

- Listen for opportunities to expand while children are cleaning up.
Child: "I cleaning."
Caregiver: "Yes, you're cleaning the table so nicely."
- Listen for your child to say action words during bath and expand on those words.
Child: "We wash."
Caregiver: "Yes, we are washing up."
- During dressing, ask the child to hold out their arms to encourage talking.
Child: "Arms."
Caregiver: (while pointing) "Yes, these are your arms, and here are your hands."

Books

- Let children "read" books to you. Listen and respond to their "reading."
Child: "Dat big bird."
Caregiver: "That is a big bird. It's an ostrich."
- Be responsive when a child comes to you with a book.
Child: "Book."
Caregiver: "Yes, let's read the book." (reads with child)
- Give time for children to respond to pages in books. Expand on child responses by adding more information.
Child: "Boat."
Caregiver: "It's a sail boat. The wind makes it go. This one is a fishing boat. They catch fish on that boat."

Imitate & Expand

Imitate a child's vocalizations or words back to the child, and expand by adding new information or words.



Ask Open-Ended Questions

What is it?

Open-ended questions are questions that encourage a response from the child that is more than a head nod or yes/no.

Questions that begin with **who, what, where, when, why, which,** and **how** are considered open-ended.

Open-ended questions can be answered with a single word or multiple words, as long as the response cannot be "yes" or "no."



Why is it important?

Open-ended questions provide opportunities for children to *practice communication* through their responses.

They encourage children to respond with a *variety* of both verbal and nonverbal responses.

Open-ended questions promote *back-and-forth interactions*, extending adult-child conversations.

Getting Started

*Did you know that children of any age benefit from being asked questions? Even infants may smile back or babble, but as they grow older, their responses will be related to the question that was asked, and become more meaningful. Asking the type of questions we are going to talk about today - Open-Ended Questions - is a fun and engaging way to encourage children to practice responding and teach **back and forth interactions**.*



Ways to Ask Open-Ended Questions

Caregiver

Ask questions and pause for a response

Ask questions about the child's play that begin with "who, what, why, where, or how." Then, pause to give the child time to think and respond.

Child

Cars.

What are you playing?

...

Where is your car going?

Ask about routines you are doing together

When you are changing diapers, you can encourage engagement by asking open-ended questions. Try it with other routines, too!

Where is your leg?

wiggles legs

That's right! That's where your leg is.

Ask questions that encourage a child to lead

When pretending to cook, you can ask questions that encourage the child to lead.

What should we cook?

We're making soup.

Oh, soup sounds yummy!

When asking questions to children who have difficulty with language, you can give extra support by providing choices or using fill in the blank.

Choices: "What do you want? Do you want the ball or the blocks?" (show choices)

Fill in the Blank: "Where is the ball? It's under the ..." (point to location)

Open Questions

Ask questions in a way that encourages children to respond in different ways, rather than simply "yes" or "no."



Often, young children don't know how to answer questions, and very young children might not understand what a question is. If a child does not answer a question, pause and then fill in the answer yourself. By modeling, you are teaching the child how to answer!

Where is the ball?

...

Oh, the ball is under the table!



Asking Open-Ended Questions with Children Who Use Gestures & Sounds

Ideas for Asking Open-Ended Questions During Activities



Play

- Notice the child's play and show you are interested and ready to engage by asking questions in a curious tone. *"What are you doing?" "What is that?"*
- Play with a puzzle or shape sorter and ask "where" questions. *"Where does it go?"* If the child doesn't answer, provide the response. *"I think the circle goes right here."*
- When you notice a child not involved in an activity, ask questions to get them playing. *"Which crayon do you want to color with?" "What would you like to do?"*



Daily Routines

- During clean-up time, ask questions to keep children involved. *"Where does this go?" "Which toy are you going to put away?"*
- Encourage interactions between children by asking "who" questions during circle or meal times. *"Who are you sitting by?" "Who is here?"*
- During routines a child knows well, such as hand washing, pause during the routine to ask questions. *"What's next?" "What do we do now?"*



Books

- When a child sits in the book area, show two or three books and ask, *"Which book do you want?"*
- When looking at books, allow the child to choose where they want to sit. *"Where should we sit to look at books?"*
- When looking at pictures in a book, ask about the story or the characters. *"Where is the duck?" "What is that?"*



After you ask a question, pause and watch the child to see if they are going to respond. It's okay if the child doesn't respond. You can either provide the answer or ask the question in a new way. Asking questions and showing children how to respond will help them learn what to do!

Open Questions

Ask questions in a way that encourages children to respond in different ways, rather than simply "yes" or "no."





Asking Open-Ended Questions with Children Who Use Words

Ideas for Asking Open-Ended Questions During Activities



Play

- Encourage friendship skills by asking open-ended questions. When a child is playing alone, ask, *"Who should we ask to come play with us?"*
- While playing outside together, ask questions that put the child in the lead. *"Where should we go next?" "What should we make with the sand?"*
- When small groups of children are playing together, ask questions that encourage them to notice each other. *"What do you think Sam is building?" "What song is Nina singing?" "What is Andre drawing?"*
- During creative play, such as art or building, ask questions about how to make things. *"How are we going to make this kite?" "How should we stack the blocks?"*



Daily Routines

- Help a child get comfortable when arriving at a familiar place by asking, *"Who should we say hello to?"*
- During routines a child is learning to complete more independently, such as toileting or hand washing, pause at a familiar step and ask, *"What do we do next?"*
- Ask questions during transition activities, like standing in line or walking in the hallway. *"Who's in front of you?" "Where are we going?" "What animal should we pretend to be?"*



Books

- Ask questions about the main idea of a picture. *"What is happening in this picture?" "What are these animals doing?"*
- Ask questions that encourage children to think about what might be happening in the story. *"What do you think will happen next?" "How do you think she feels?"*
- Choose books that show everyday events, such as eating, playing, or bathing. This can make it easier for children to answer questions like, *"What are they doing here?"* or *"Why is she doing that?"*



It takes time and practice for children to be able to answer questions about pictures and books. If children look confused or don't respond, model how to answer the question.

Open Questions

Ask questions in a way that encourages children to respond in different ways, rather than simply "yes" or "no."



Giving Praise & Positive Attention

What is it?

Praise* and **positive attention** encourage behaviors we want to see more of, including child communication.

Praise is making *specific positive comments* about a child's communication and behavior.

Positive attention is encouraging children in what they are doing by *paying attention to and being engaged* with them.



Why is it important?

Positive comments, smiles, and nonverbal interactions, such as a pat on the back, let the child know they are doing something important.

When you use positive comments after children use vocalizations, words, and other methods of communication, a child is more likely to use them again in the future.

Positive attention for communication and other prosocial behaviors encourage children to practice and develop those skills.

Getting Started

Today, we are going to talk about a strategy that encourages communication and increases the behaviors you want to see more of from a child. The strategy is Praise and Positive Attention. This specific type of praise works by letting children know exactly what they did that brought about the positive attention. We are also going to talk about why it is valuable to provide positive attention by **being present** for and **engaging** in activities with children.

*We all have different thoughts about praise, influenced by our own childhood experiences and, as adults, our exposure to differing perspectives. If the caregiver you are working with has concerns, take time to learn those concerns and where they come from. Then, assure the caregiver the type of praise we are talking about today is very specific and will encourage child communication and positive behaviors.



Ways to Give Praise & Positive Attention



Watch for opportunities to use positive attention and praise throughout the day

This includes play, meals, transitions, and routine care such as changing diapers, putting on coats, and washing hands.



Ask questions to create opportunities for a child to receive positive attention

At dinner, model table manners and provide an opportunity for praise by saying, "Would you please pass me the bread? Thank you for passing me the bread! You're such a good helper."



Talk about the specific behavior the child engaged in that you want to see more of

Positive attention can be given for specific behaviors, such as trying new things, playing nicely with other children, communicating with sounds or gestures, and helping.



Notice when a child is using communication, then give attention and respond

When a child points to a favorite doll, label the doll and offer it to the child.



Learn what types of positive attention the child prefers

Use the child's personal preferences to encourage them. A child might prefer a smile, hug, pat on the back, or high five. Sometimes, playing with the child is most valuable.

Positive Attention

Pay attention, respond, and make positive comments to children when they use vocalizations, words, and gestures.



When you notice and talk about positive behaviors, that child and other children in the room have the chance to learn what is expected of them. It is especially important for children who often need to be redirected to hear when they are doing something positive, like listening, sharing, or helping.



Giving Positive Attention to Children Who Use Gestures & Sounds

Ideas for Giving Praise & Positive Attention During Activities



Play

- Tell a child how nicely they are playing. *"Wow, look at how nice you are playing with that puzzle."* Then, sit down and play together.
- Be specific with positive attention when a child gives another child a hug or a soft touch. *"You gave Kyle such a nice hug!"*
- Playing with a child gives positive attention and encourages communication. They can receive this positive attention best when you are at eye level and engaged with them.



Daily Routines

- Give a child attention for holding their bottle or cup by themselves by saying, *"You know just how to use that cup!"*
- Talk about how nicely the child is lying while you are changing their diaper. *"You are waiting so nicely for me to finish with your diaper."*
- Give positive attention as children are learning new skills, such as crawling, walking, or feeding themselves. *"Wow, look at you walking all by yourself!"*



Books

- Notice when a child is interested in a book, and give them positive attention by sitting with the child and looking at it together.
- When a child is looking at a book with you and points to or tries to label pictures, name things with them. *"You pointed to the tree! That's a big tree with green leaves."*
- Ask the child to help you turn the pages or hold the book to increase opportunities to give positive attention for helping.

When giving positive attention to children who are sensitive to touch, you can watch carefully to figure out what kind of positive attention they prefer. If they stiffen or pull away when you hug them, try a high five or pat on the back instead. If that is too much, smile at their eye level and clap quietly.

Positive Attention

Pay attention, respond, and make positive comments to children when they use vocalizations, words, and gestures.





Giving Positive Attention to Children Who Use Words

Ideas for Giving Praise and Positive Attention During Activities



Play

- Provide multiples of toys so children can share more easily, creating opportunities to give positive attention for sharing. *"You are sharing your toys so nicely with your friends."*
- Model asking for toys using *"please"* and *"thank you,"* so children are more likely to use those words. This can create more opportunities to give positive attention for good manners. *"Thank you for saying 'please' when you asked for that toy."*
- A puzzle can provide many opportunities to give positive attention, both to celebrate successes and encourage asking for help. *"You got the piece in!" "You used your words to ask for help!"*



Daily Routines

- Give positive attention to children for doing things on their own, such as putting their coat on by themselves. *"You put on your coat all by yourself, great job!"*
- Respond with positive attention when children are eating nicely during mealtimes. *"You are using your spoon so nicely to eat your corn."*
- During transitions between activities, such as getting ready to go outside, give positive attention to children who are waiting patiently. *"Thank you for standing so nicely with your hands to yourself."*



Books

- Notice when a child is interested in a book, and respond with positive attention by sitting with the child and reading it together.
- When a child is sitting and reading a book nicely, let them know that you notice. *"You are sitting so nicely with your book; it looks like you really like it."*
- Give positive attention to children when they are sharing their book with a friend. *"Thanks for sharing your book with your friend. That was really nice of you."*

Positive Attention

Pay attention, respond, and make positive comments to children when they use vocalizations, words, and gestures.

Children who are adjusting to a new place or who have experienced trauma might have a hard time sharing what type of positive attention they prefer.

You can offer a **choice** while showing options.

"Do you want a high five or a fist bump?"



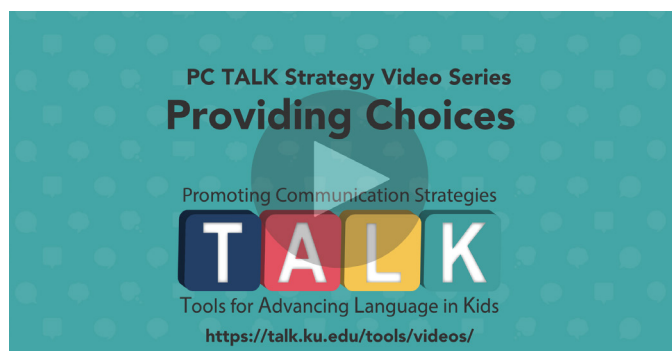
Providing Choices

What is it?

Caregivers **provide choices** by offering two objects or activities for a child to choose between, encouraging the communication of a choice by the child.

Providing choices includes setting up the environment to give children opportunities to choose activities, toys, and objects.

Use a communication board or pictures to help children with specific language needs make choices.



Why is it important?

By having more than one object to **choose** from, children have more opportunities to practice communication and language.

Providing choices gives children a sense of control throughout their day. When children must do an activity, such as washing hands, choosing *how* to do it can help children follow directions.

Giving choices allows children to choose an object or activity in which they are most interested. When children are interested in what they are playing with or the activity they are doing, they are more likely to talk about it.

Getting Started

*Think of some things young children have limited choices about. There are a lot! Children need certain things to stay healthy, like having their diapers changed and eating healthy foods. Sometimes these can be hard for young children and can cause frustration, crying, and even behavior issues like biting and hitting. We can help by **providing choices** as often as possible for things that can be optional, and providing choices about how to do activities or routines that aren't optional.*



Ways to Provide Choices

Present a child with two items and ask the child to pick one

"What shoes do you want to wear today, your red shoes or your blue shoes?"



Give choices only when children really have a choice

Ask yourself, would either choice I'm giving be acceptable for the child to choose?

✓ *"Would you like to play with the cars or the animals?"*

⊗ *"Do you want to put the toys away before going outside?"*

Show visuals of choices

When possible, hold up the choices or some visual representation of the choices to which children can respond. This helps young children understand the words you are saying.



When activities aren't optional, give choices about how to do them

There are certain things that aren't optional for children. Babies must have their diapers changed. Toddlers must wash their hands before and after meals. While the activities themselves are not optional, there are choices that can be made during those activities. *"Do you want to hold the rattle or the ball while I'm changing your diaper?" "Do you want to sing 'Row your Boat' or 'The Wheels on the Bus' while we wash hands?"*

POP in choices!

Think "POP" when you are providing choices.

Present two choices.

Hold the two choices apart so it is easier to see which the child is choosing.

Observe the child.

Pause to see if the child looks at one choice longer or reaches for a choice.

Provide the name for the child's choice.

As you are handing the child the object they chose, label it.

Provide Choices

Provide two objects or activities from which a child can choose, to encourage communication.





Providing Choices to Children Who Use Gestures & Sounds

Ideas for Providing Choices During Activities



Play

- Put a variety of toys out during play times, giving a choice of activities.
- Hold up two toys, a car and a doll, and let the child point to or reach for the object they want to play with.
- When a child is working on a shape sorter or puzzle, present two pieces to the child and ask, *"Do you want the square or the circle?"*
- When playing music, ask the child what they want to hear and give a choice between musicians or songs the child knows.



Daily Routines

- At snack or meal time, present two options. *"Do you want peas or carrots?"*
- During diapering, offer a choice of toys for the child to hold. *"Do you want the car or the rattle?"*
- Allow a child to choose their cup. *"Do you want the green cup or the blue cup?"*
- Set two outfits side by side to give the child a choice about what to wear. *"Do you want to wear the truck shirt or the flower shirt?"*



Books

- Hold up two books and have the child point to or reach for the book they want to look at. *"Do you want the animal book or train book?"*
- During storytime, offer a choice of seating. *"Do you want to sit on the floor or in a chair?"*
- After finishing a book, offer a choice to continue reading or transition to a new activity. *"Do you want to read more books or build with the blocks?"*



Did you know even infants make choices? Observe carefully to see what their choices are. Babies may kick more for a certain object, gaze at it, smile at it, or reach for it. If you hold objects at the baby's eye level, but farther apart from each other, it will be easier to tell which object they are choosing.

Provide Choices

Provide two objects or activities from which a child can choose, to encourage communication.





Providing Choices to Children Who Use Words

Ideas for Providing Choices During Activities



Play

- Offer a choice of two different kinds of toys to play with. *"Do you want the wooden blocks or the little people?"*
- When a child needs some direction in their play activity, offer a choice. *"Which would you like to play with - the dinosaurs or the puzzles?"*
- During an art activity, offer a choice of writing utensils, colors, and/or materials. *"Do you want markers or crayons?" "Which color paper would you like to use?"*
- Give choices that encourage social play. *"Do you want to play blocks with Lilly or kitchen with Malik?"*



Daily Routines

- Encourage children to help serve food by providing choices. *"Would you like to pass out the cheese or the grapes?"*
- During clean-up time, ask the child which toys they want to put away. *"Would you like to put away the blocks or the cars?"*
- When diapering, give choices of songs to sing. *"Do you want to sing 'ABCs' or 'Wheels on the Bus'?"*
- As a child becomes more independent with self-care, offer a choice of going alone or with an adult. *"Do you want to go potty by yourself or do you want me to come?"*



Books

- Make a variety of books available to children throughout the day.
- Present two books for children to choose to read. *"Do you want to read 'There was an Old Lady' or 'The Very Hungry Caterpillar'?"*
- Have children choose where they want to sit and look at books. *"Would you like to sit at the table or sit on a pillow while you read?"*
- Let children choose who will read. *"Do you want to read the story or do you want me to read it to you?"*

Providing choices allows dual language learners to see words paired with objects and equips children with the words they need. If you speak both of the child's languages, offer the choice in one of their languages, and if they do not respond, offer the choice in their other language.

Provide Choices

Provide two objects or activities from which a child can choose, to encourage communication.



Fill in the Blank

What is it?

Fill in the Blank is a back-and-forth interaction that gives the child an opportunity to use a familiar word or sound to finish a phrase the caregiver started.

Caregivers are using **Fill in the Blank** when they pause before a word in a familiar story, song, or phrase to give the child an opportunity to say the missing word or phrase, or react in some other way.



Why is it important?

Planning a delay during a predictable routine with a child can encourage communication.

Children can demonstrate what they know and can say.

It provides children with the opportunity to practice communication while having fun **filling in the blank**.

It emphasizes the child's success when they know what word to use to fill in the blank.

Filling in the blank uses familiar phrases and situations to encourage quiet children to speak.

Getting Started

Have you ever noticed how excited children get when you use the phrase, "Ready, set, go!" Sometimes we tease by waiting a bit to say "go" and get giggles from the children as they get ready for what comes next. Or, think about when you play "I'm going to get you" with a baby, and they kick and coo as you pause and hold up your hands to tickle. Even from a very young age, children know what to expect in familiar routines, and we can use these routines to encourage communication through a strategy called

Fill in the Blank.



Ways to Use Fill in the Blank

Pause when singing a familiar song

Leave off a word and pause to give children an opportunity to finish the phrase.

"The wheels on the bus go round and..."

Use the same familiar phrase to encourage talk during book reading

A phrase such as, "I see a..." can be used in any book, so children can become familiar with filling in the blank to name the picture you are pointing at.

When a child needs something but isn't talking, help them with a starter phrase

Look at the child expectantly and wait 3-5 seconds. If the child doesn't initiate some communication, start a phrase for them such as, "I want the ..." and let them fill the word in or help them point to what they need.

Think PEAR when you are using Fill in the Blank

Pace

Pace your pause. Give children enough time to process and respond, but say the word and move on if they do not.

Express

Your facial expression and tone of voice can cue your child to fill in the blank. It is okay if the child doesn't respond, but act as if they will.

Acknowledge

The child may make a noise, gesture, or say the word. Say something positive back!

Repeat

Repeat the phrase often. The more you say the phrase over time, the more likely the child is to respond when it becomes familiar to them.

Blank



Fill in the Blank

Plan a delay in a predictable routine, song, or common phrase to encourage the child to communicate.



Fill in the Blank is also called "time delay," and is used when the child is familiar with the routine and knows what to expect. If the child doesn't communicate during the pause, simply model the word and continue.

Your interactions should remain positive when children do not fill in the blank.

After waiting for the child to fill in the blank, fill it in for them.



Using Fill in the Blank with Children Who Use Gestures & Sounds

Ideas for Using Fill in the Blank During Activities



Play

- Play a game of peek-a-boo. After 2-3 turns, hide your face and say, "Peek-a-..." Wait for the child to try to say "boo." Once the child responds, show your face and smile.
- Blow bubbles for children. Hold the bubble wand to your mouth and say, "1, 2, ..." Once a child makes a sound or gesture to fill in the blank with "3" and blow the bubbles.
- When playing with pop-up toys, establish a "Ready, set, go" routine before each turn. After 2-3 opportunities, say, "Ready, set..." and allow the child the opportunity to make a sound or gesture to indicate "go."



Daily Routines

- Name food items while pointing to them during lunch. After 2-3 labels, point to a food and pause to give an opportunity for children to label the food.
- Sing a familiar song during diapering, then pause so the child can fill in the blank. "Head, shoulders, knees, and..." As soon as the child gestures or makes a sound, sing the word and continue the song.
- Teach children greetings with fill in the blank. When a familiar person comes into the room, say, "Look, it's..." and see if the child will gesture or make a sound for the person's name. Then, model the name. "It's Cameron. Hi, Cameron!"



Books

- Read books with simple sounds, such as animal, car, or silly sounds. This will make it easier for children to respond when you use fill in the blank. "The dog says..."
- Add familiar songs to picture books to encourage fill in the blank. If you are looking at a picture book with animals, you can point to a picture of a cow and sing, "The cow says..." to the tune of "Farmer in the Dell," pausing so the children can attempt the animal sound.
- Count books as you and the children are putting them away in a basket. Then, pause to see if the children will try to say "book." "1 book, 2 books, 3 books, 4..."

Fill in the Blank

Plan a delay in a predictable routine, song, or common phrase to encourage the child to communicate.





Using Fill in the Blank with Children Who Use Words

Ideas for Using Fill in the Blank During Activities



Play

- Sing a familiar song to the child and pause. *"Three little monkeys jumping on the..."* Wait for the child to fill in the blank before continuing the song.
- When a child is placing puzzle pieces into a puzzle board, establish a phrase such as, *"Hi pig, hi cow, hi horse,"* as the child places each piece. After a few pieces are completed, begin the phrase and pause to allow the child to finish. *"Hi..."*
- When handing blocks to a child, hold one back and wait for the child to request the block. Once the child requests the block, give the child the block and continue playing. If the child doesn't respond, start a phrase like, *"I want..."* If the child still doesn't respond, model *"more blocks,"* and give the child the block.



Daily Routines

- When setting the table for lunch, pause before handing a plate to a child, waiting for a request for the plate. Or, the child can finish a sentence such as, *"I want a..."*
- If a child sees a cup of water and reaches for the cup, the adult may model, *"May I please have some...?"* to see if the child will say *"water."*
- Review rules with the children and allow them to fill in the blanks about how to behave. *"In the hallway, we have calm..."*



Books

- Pause during familiar stories to allow children to fill in the blank about what happens next. This should be used at meaningful points during familiar stories.
- Look at the cover of a book together and name the title of the book, pausing for key words you think the children know. If they don't fill in the blank, say the word for them.
- Pause when reading familiar books to give children the opportunity to participate. To help children know what to say, use books that repeat the same lines often. When reading *"Brown Bear, Brown Bear,"* say, *"I see a red bird looking at..."* and allow the children to say *"me."*

To help children who have difficulty saying words, combine actions with fill in the blank. This helps children with certain language issues get words out more easily. For each word, jump, wave your arms, or gesture with the child, then pause both your words and actions to encourage the child to fill in the blank.

Fill in the Blank

Plan a delay in a predictable routine, song, or common phrase to encourage the child to communicate.



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