




Parent-Infant Interaction & Child's Language Development

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Why does communicating with babies matter?

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What are the most effective ways of encouraging parents and carers to communicate with babies?

1. Contingency



- Are parent and child “in tune” with each other – really communicating together?
- Contingency → better communication → better language.
- Not just volume of talk, but also whether it is contingent.
- Effect on vocabulary, syntax **and attachment.**

What Can Parents Do?

- Say again more correctly what the child has tried to say.
- Say it in better words.
- Developing what the child says - more effective than just telling the child what to do.
- Better explanations → more questions is good!



What Kind of Parent?

- ❁ Concerned with product of language or how the child gets to that point (process).
- ❁ Product-oriented parents are more controlling.

2. Reminiscing

- 🌐 Talking about past shared events
- 🌐 Need elaborated conversations
- 🌐 Introduction of new words
- 🌐 Changes in expression
- 🌐 Exploring cause and effect
- 🌐 Exploring peoples' motivations
- 🌐 Describing objects and actions
- 🌐 Making links to other experiences
- 🌐 Making logical connections

4. Other Useful Things

- Telling nursery rhymes - having the child join in
- Playing rhyming games
- Telling or discussing stories
- Learning the alphabet, numbers, and letters
- Learning activities outside the home, such as going to the shops, library or museum
- Think about the nature of toys and books – how can they be used interactively

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What gets in the way of parents and carers communicating with babies and young children?

Differences in Parents

- 🌐 Parents think they talk more to children than they do
- 🌐 More “turns” of conversation → better language development
- 🌐 More parent-child talk towards end of day – so try earlier!
- 🌐 Turn off the TV – it stops parent-child talk
- 🌐 Use baby buggies that have the child facing the parent

Differences in Parents #4

Bilingualism:

- 🌐 Children learning two languages develop language similarly to children using one language
- 🌐 However, children learning two languages tend to know fewer words in each of their languages than children who only know one language.

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What gets in the way of parents and carers communicating with babies and young children?

- Barriers and challenges to parents are often not directly related to language interaction
- E.g., age, education, ethnicity, socio-economic status, bilingualism (or parents' first language) and mental health.
- Barriers = what parents **are**, possibilities = what parents can **do**.

Summary

- 🌐 The first three years are crucial for language development.
- 🌐 Parents can make an enormous difference.
- 🌐 This is of great importance for children, parents, teachers, a range of professionals, external funders – and indeed, everybody.

Reference

Keith Topping, Rayenne Dekhinet & Suzanne Zeedyk (2013) Parent-infant interaction and children's language development, *Educational Psychology: An International Journal of Experimental Educational Psychology*, 33:4, 391-426, DOI: [10.1080/01443410.2012.744159](https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2012.744159)



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