

Childcare and Parenting **13** Series

Communicating with Words For 2-4 years old



After the second birthday, with the pool of his vocabulary building up, your child is more able to express his needs verbally. Providing a suitable language environment with language activities helps your child develop his language into a tool for communication, learning and thinking. As children vary in the pace of language development, in particular, expressive skills, it is essential to understand your child's level of language abilities.



Characteristics of Language Development for the 2-4 years old

Below is a brief general description of the language development for children from age 2 to 4. More details can be found in the *Child Development* leaflet series.

Approx. Age	Comprehension	Expression
2-3 years	Understand simple 'yes/no', 'what' and 'where' questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak in phrases or simple sentences e.g. 'Mummy want cookie' • Start to use pronouns • By age 3, speak short sentences with pronouns e.g. 'I want my cup' • Use adjectives e.g. 'pretty', 'hot' • Like to ask 'what', 'where' questions
3-4 years	Follow daily instructions e.g. 'Put the T-shirt into the laundry basket in the toilet.'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe events and what is going on in simple terms • Like to ask 'why' questions • By age 4, speak fluently

How to Provide a Rich Language Environment?

Talking with Your Child

You are the closest person and model to your child. Making use of everyday opportunities to talk with your child enriches her listening and speaking experiences.

★ Describing your actions

Describe to your child what you are doing, e.g. 'Mummy is putting the clothes in the drawer.' Take into consideration your child's level of understanding and use clear and concise terms.

★ Using questions

Use questions appropriately to elicit ideas and words from your child. For example, 'Do you want to have bread?' 'What are you making?' When her vocabulary expands, use more open-ended questions such as 'What would you like for breakfast?' instead of closed-ended ones. This can encourage her to elaborate what she wants.

★ Responding actively

A 3-year-old is typically expressive and inquisitive. When she approaches you, try to stop what you are doing and attend to her words. Encourage her to talk by smiling, nodding or giving praises. Wait patiently for her to finish before you respond.



★ Adding new words and concepts



Adding new concepts to what your child says facilitates her learning. For instance, when she says 'Mummy want cookies', you can respond by saying, 'You are hungry and want Mummy to give you some cookies.' Another example is when she says 'doggies run here', you can respond by saying, 'Oh yes, there is a white dog. A black one is coming, too.'

★ Learning in a natural atmosphere

Your child may speak in short sentences that are not grammatically correct, e.g. 'Why not me can play?' instead of 'Why can't I play?' Also, she may not pronounce correctly most of the time until she reaches age four. Do not shame her. Just repeat her words correctly and do not demand her to imitate you. For example, when she says 'tu' for 'soup', simply say it for her, 'Yes, that's soup.'

Reading with Your Child

A child aged 2 to 4 likes reading. He will enjoy sitting on your lap and looking at the pictures while you are reading to him. Try to spare some time to read with him every day. Not only does it enhance your intimate relationship with your child, it also helps facilitate your child's language development, imagination and thinking.

How to choose a book

1. It should contain colourful and clearly drawn pictures.
2. The pictures should make sense in telling the story without printed words. Words written should be simple and brief.
3. The content should be appropriate for the child's developmental level and describe things or events familiar to him.

How to read with your child

1. Let your child choose the book and pages to read.
2. Have your child sit on your lap or by your side and read together with him.
3. Let him help hold the book and turn the pages.
4. Point to the pictures as you talk about them.
5. Guide him to observe and describe the pictures or tell the story to you.
6. When reading a story to him, leave out words or parts of sentences for him to fill in from time to time. Stop and ask questions like 'What will happen then?' This helps your child learn to describe events and develop logical reasoning.
7. Children like to hear the same story repeatedly. Make use of this characteristic and apply the above techniques to guide your child to tell a familiar story by himself gradually.



8. Remember to show interest and give praises and encouragement to what he says.
9. Do not put pressure on the child by demanding him to spell or read the words. It will only make reading a boring and dreadful task for him.

Playing with Your Child

A child aged 2 to 4 likes to self-talk during play. She likes to play the different roles encountered in her daily life or talk about her imagination.



Talk with your child while playing with her using the communication techniques mentioned in the section "Talking with Your Child".

Musical Activities with Your Child



Rhythm attracts a child's interest and attention. Listening to music and singing with her can also facilitate your child's language development. Make up your own lyrics and put them in familiar rhymes. For example, 'London Bridge is falling down' may be changed into 'Leaves from trees are falling down' or 'London Bridge is long and tall'. Adding in movements will make more fun.

Frequently Asked Questions on Language Development

? : **How to encourage my child to speak in front of other people?**



Children should learn to speak in a natural atmosphere. Forcing your child to speak or perform in front of people would only put pressure on both of you. Allow him to greet by nodding or smiling when meeting strangers. Children will usually start talking after they have warmed up and become relaxed.



? : **My child 'stutters' when she is eager to tell me something. Is there anything wrong with her?**



It is common for the 2- to 3-year-olds to repeat sounds, syllables and words when they are speaking. The behaviour frequently appears under pressure or hurry. This is not stuttering but normal repetition when the speech is not fluent. It may eventually disappear together as your child matures. Instead of shaming or criticizing her, be patient to listen to her without interrupting or urging. Avoid speaking too fast for the child to imitate. If repetitions are significant or still exist after age four, seek consultation from doctor or speech therapist.



I have employed a Philipino maid to take care of my child. Will a bilingual environment affect my child's language development?

There is no evidence from research that bilingualism will cause language disorder in children. In the environment with sufficient and good quality bilingual input, children are able to acquire both languages and meet the milestones. Among the children with language delay, some researchers suggested that bilingual children are able to acquire similar language proficiency as their monolingual peers without extra disadvantage. However, overall some delay in both languages may be expected. Therefore, if bilingualism happens in natural environment at home, limitation of the use of language may not be needed.



Can watching electronic screen products help my child to speak?

Electronic screen products provide attractive visual images to hold children's attention and rich ideas for parents to talk with their children. However, they only provide a one-way delivery of messages instead of interactive communication. Some computer or mobile apps may be interactive but they could produce unnecessary sounds or images that distract children from attending to the content. The quality of the content may also need careful screening. Choose materials screened on these devices appropriate to your child's development level. Set a time limit for the electronic screen time, watch together and talk along with him. Guide him to understand the content and learn about his ideas towards the show or activity. Limit screen time with various electronic media to no more than one hour for the 2-year-olds. Spending quality time with your child is a more effective means in language facilitation.

For more information, please refer "Do your 0-5 years old children need electronic screen products?"



<http://s.fhs.gov.hk/hlja3>



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Website: www.fhs.gov.hk

24-hour information hotline: 2112 9900

