

**Early Childhood Education**  
**Talking *with* your 3-5 year old**

**Category: Early Childhood Language/Literacy**

**Grade Band: Ages 3 to 5**

**Topic: Daily Routines**

**Concepts: Receptive/Expressive Vocabulary, Development of Spoken Language, Developing Background Knowledge, Opportunities to Talk**

**Context:** Children learn spoken language through the nurturing relationships between themselves and caring adults. This very important life-long skill develops primarily through verbal interaction during daily routines. Parents can support language learning by describing their actions and thoughts throughout the day (self-talk), speaking at a level that their child can understand, exposing their children to new vocabulary, being responsive to communication attempts, and inviting children to talk before, during and after daily routines. TV is *not* a good language teacher. It is not personal to the child's life, provides no feedback, and does not allow opportunities for children to learn the social aspects of language (i.e. turn taking, eye contact, careful listening). When parents engage their children in conversation, they are supporting critical foundational skills necessary for literacy and mathematical learning.

**Rationale:** Language skills are one of the most important life skills children learn. The human brain is pre-wired to learn language. However, the language center in the brain needs stimulation from the environment to grow and develop. Learning to understand and use words effectively is complex. Children need to hear language (Hart and Risley, 2003), get feedback for verbal attempts, and have many opportunities to talk (practice). Parents are their children's first and most influential teacher. This is particularly true as it relates to language development. Parents who help their children in learning to be effective communicators are helping their children enhance the likelihood that they will be able to use language to think and solve problems in school and other life tasks.

## Talking with your Preschooler

### Opportunities to support language learning through daily routines

- I. Our days are full of opportunities to talk with each other. For young children, these opportunities become especially important, as they lay the foundation for understanding the complex skill of communication. From sunrise to sunset, conversations can occur that help young children learn **vocabulary**. Children need to learn new vocabulary continuously. Research has found a connection between strong vocabularies and ease in learning to read (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). Consider **getting dressed**. Learning clothing names and parts of clothing can be introduced and reinforced. Words like *overalls, blouse, gloves, scarf, sandals, vest, collar, polka dot, striped* are unusual words that help children expand what they know and what they can talk about. Remember, children need to hear new words over and over before they can use it spontaneously. Listening to you (parent) talk is important, but **invite your child to be part of the conversation**. Children need lots of practice to speak in complete sentences and to use new words they have heard. **Making comments** about what you see your child doing is one way you can encourage your child to talk with you. *Oh, I m glad you picked out a long sleeve shirt today.* Make sure you give your child a chance to respond. Sometimes it takes young children a few more seconds to organize their thoughts. *Hey, you got those buttons all by yourself! Hmmm.. I wonder how these shorts got this hole.* Simple comments like this, invite responses. **Ask your child WH and open-ended questions.** *Which socks would you like to wear today? This sweater doesn't fit you anymore. What happened?*

### Mathematical Connections

As you talk with your child, you can include mathematical thinking and reasoning.

- A pair of mittens
- Counting buttons as you button
- Talking about patterns (big stripe, little stripe, big stripe)
- Comparing (longer socks, shorter socks)

**II. Taking a bath** is often a time that preschoolers enjoy. This routine activity offers rich opportunities to **engage your child in conversation**. Consider the following **words** that can be introduced: *liquid soap, germs, faucet, drain, warm, cool, temperature, wait, elbows, shoulders*. **Have fun** with your child during these daily encounters. Your time spent together talking will help build important social skills like **confidence** and **initiative**. When young children have time to talk about what they are doing, they are building important **background knowledge** about how their world works. It's easy to engage your child in conversation! Just practice a few simple techniques (strategies). Build on your **child's natural sense of curiosity**. Talk with your child about how you use hot and cold water to make it warm. Ask your child to predict how many bubbles will appear by adding bubble bath a little at a time. **Make comments**. *Oh, I guess we got the water really high tonight*. **Ask questions**. *How does the water feel?* Time spent in meaningful, positive conversation will help children build vocabulary, extend sentence length, and be more confident about talking.

### **Mathematical Connections**

Opportunities to talk about mathematical concepts:

- Sequencing (First we run the water, then we get the soap and the water toys, then we get in etc)
- Comparing amounts of water held in different tub toys

**III.** Many parents spend a considerable amount of time in the car with their preschoolers (doing errands, driving to preschool, traveling to family events, etc). This can be an excellent time to have **conversation** with your child. **New vocabulary** is all around: *direction, speed, traffic, turn signal, windshield, steering wheel, and safety*. Children learn new words by hearing them often. A strong vocabulary is important for **reading comprehension**. Children who enter school with good vocabularies are better prepared to understand a wide variety of books and other texts. Riding in the car is also a good time to sing songs together. The brain loves music, rhyme, and rhythm. **Singing** familiar nursery

**rhyme** songs helps children start to recognize the **sound in words**, a necessary skill in learning to read. *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*, *Mary had a Little Lamb*, and *Row, Row, Row your Boat* are songs that young children have been singing with their parents for years. It seems there is important educational value in singing these rhyming songs. Being able to **hear sounds in words** is one of the best predictors of reading success. Finally, as you spend time with your preschooler in the car, you can point out print in the environment. You aren't teaching your child to read. You are helping him/her develop the important understanding that print carries meaning. Labels like *Stop*, *K-Mart*, *McDonalds*, *Target* are common print often recognized by young children. Remember, you do need to draw attention to the print for children to develop an interest.

- VI.** These are just a few examples of how you can help your child learn valuable skills, just by talking with him/her. Really anything you do throughout the day is probably a time to have some quality 1:1 conversation time. So, turn off the TV, the radio, and the cell phone. Have some fun talking with your child!

\*Note: I understand we cannot video bath time. I included it, for an example. I did not think a 3-5 minute video would allow for all three examples.